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THIS book consists of John Buchan's four Sir Edward Leithen novels, which are also published separately under the following titles :

THE POWER-HOUSE.

THE DANCING FLOOR.

JOHN MACNAB.

THE GAP IN THE CURTAIN.

Also the story " Sing a Song of Sixpence," from THE RUNAGATES CLUB..

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LEITHEN

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THE ADVENTURES OF

SIR EDWARD LEITHEN ✓



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Hall
SING. A SONG
OF SIXPENCE

I: SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE

The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen ; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it.—R. L. STEVENSON.

LEITHEN'S face had that sharp chiselling of the jaw and that compression of the lips which seem to follow upon high legal success. Also an overdose of German gas in 1918 had given his skin a habitual pallor, so that he looked not unhealthy, but notably urban. As a matter of fact he was one of the hardest men I have ever known, but a chance observer might have guessed from his complexion that he rarely left the pavements.

Burminster, who had come back from a month in the grass countries with a face like a deep-sea mariner's, commented on this one evening.

"How do you manage always to look the complete Cit, Ned?" he asked. "You're as much a Londoner as a Parisian is a Parisian, if you know what I mean."

Leithen said that he was not ashamed of it, and he embarked on a eulogy of the metropolis. In London you met sooner or later everybody you had ever known ; you could lay your hand on any knowledge you wanted ; you could pull strings that controlled the innermost Sahara and the topmost Pamirs. Romance lay in wait for you at every street corner. It was the true City of the Caliphs.

"That is what they say," said Sandy Arbuthnot

sadly, "but I never found it so. I yawn my head off in London. Nothing amusing ever finds me out—I have to go and search for it, and it usually costs the deuce of a lot."

"I once stumbled upon a pretty generous allowance of romance," said Leithen, "and it cost me precisely sixpence."

Then he told us this story.

It happened a good many years ago, just when I was beginning to get on at the Bar. I spent busy days in court and chambers, but I was young and had a young man's appetite for society, so I used to dine out most nights and go to more balls than were good for me. It was pleasant after a heavy day to dive into a different kind of life. My rooms at the time were in Down Street, the same house as my present one, only two floors higher up.

On a certain night in February I was dining in Bryanston Square with the Nantleys. Mollie Nantley was an old friend, and used to fit me as an unattached bachelor into her big dinners. She was a young hostess and full of ambition, and one met an odd assortment of people at her house. Mostly political of course, but a sprinkling of art and letters, and any visiting lion that happened to be passing through. Mollie was a very innocent lion-hunter, but she had a partiality for the breed.

I don't remember much about the dinner, except that the principal guest had failed her. Mollie was loud in her lamentations. He was a South American President who had engineered a very

pretty *coup d'état* the year before, and was now in England on some business concerning the finances of his state. You may remember his name—Ramon Pelem—he made rather a stir in the world for a year or two. I had read about him in the papers, and had looked forward to meeting him, for he had won his way to power by extraordinary boldness and courage, and he was quite young. There was a story that he was partly English and that his grandfather's name had been Pelham. I don't know what truth there was in that, but he knew England well and Englishmen liked him.

Well, he had cried off on the telephone an hour before, and Mollie was grievously disappointed. Her other guests bore the loss with more fortitude, for I expect they thought he was a brand of cigar.

In those days dinners began earlier and dances later than they do to-day. I meant to leave soon, go back to my rooms and read briefs, and then look in at Lady Samplar's dance between eleven and twelve. So at nine-thirty I took my leave.

Jervis, the old butler, who had been my ally from boyhood, was standing on the threshold, and in the square there was a considerable crowd now thinning away. I asked what the trouble was.

"There's been an arrest, Mr. Edward," he said in an awestruck voice. "It 'appened when I was serving coffee in the dining-room, but our Albert saw it all. Two foreigners, he said—proper rascals by their look—were took away by the

police just outside this very door. The constables was very nippy and collared them before they could use their pistols—but they 'ad pistols on them and no mistake. Albert says he saw the weapons."

"Did they propose to burgle you?" I asked.

"I cannot say, Mr. Edward. But I shall give instructions for a very careful lock-up to-night."

There were no cabs about, so I decided to walk on and pick one up. When I got into Great Cumberland Place it began to rain sharply, and I was just about to call a prowling hansom, when I put my hand into my pocket. I found that I had no more than one solitary sixpence.

I could of course have paid when I got to my flat. But as the rain seemed to be slacking off, I preferred to walk. Mollie's dining-room had been stuffy, I had been in court all day, and I wanted some fresh air.

You know how in little things, when you have decided on a course, you are curiously reluctant to change it. Before I got to the Marble Arch it had begun to rain in downright earnest. But I still stumped on. Only I entered the Park, for even in February there is a certain amount of cover from the trees.

I passed one or two hurried pedestrians, but the place was almost empty. The occasional lamps made only spots of light in a dripping darkness, and it struck me that this was a curious patch of gloom and loneliness to be so near to crowded streets, for with the rain had come a fine mist. I pitied the poor devils to whom it was the only home. There was one of them on a seat which

I passed. The collar of his thin shabby overcoat was turned up, and his shameful old felt hat was turned down, so that only a few square inches of pale face were visible. His toes stuck out of his boots, and he seemed sunk in a sodden misery. \

I passed him and then turned back. Casual charity is an easy dope for the conscience, and I indulge in it too often. When I approached him he seemed to stiffen, and his hands moved in his pockets.

"A rotten night," I said. "Is sixpence any good to you?" And I held out my solitary coin.

He lifted his face, and I started. For the eyes that looked at me were not those of a waster. They were bright, penetrating, authoritative—and they were young. I was conscious that they took in more of me than mine did of him.

"Thank you very much," he said, as he took the coin, and the voice was that of a cultivated man. "But I'm afraid I need rather more than sixpence."

"How much?" I asked. This was clearly an original.

"To be accurate, five million pounds."

He was certainly mad, but I was fascinated by this wisp of humanity. I wished that he would show more of his face.

"Till your ship comes home," I said, "you want a bed, and you'd be the better of a change. Sixpence is all I have on me. But if you come to my rooms I'll give you the price of a night's lodging, and I think I might find you some old clothes."

see page 40

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Close by—in Down Street." I gave the number.

He seemed to reflect, and then he shot a glance on either side into the gloom behind the road. It may have been fancy, but I thought that I saw something stir in the darkness.

"What are you?" he asked.

I was getting abominably wet, and yet I submitted to be cross-examined by this waif.

"I am a lawyer," I said.

He looked at me again, very intently.

"Have you a telephone?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Right," he said. "You seem a good fellow and I'll take you at your word. I'll follow you. . . . Don't look back, please. It's important. . . . I'll be in Down Street as soon as you. . . . *Marchons.*"

It sounds preposterous, but I did exactly as I was bid. I never looked back, but I kept my ears open for the sound of following footsteps. I thought I heard them, and then they seemed to die away. I turned out of the Park at Grosvenor Gate and went down Park Lane. When I reached the house which contained my flat, I looked up and down the street, but it was empty except for a waiting four-wheeler. But just as I turned in I caught a glimpse of someone running at the Hertford Street end. The runner came to a sudden halt, and I saw that it was not the man I had left.

To my surprise I found the waif on the landing outside my flat. I was about to tell him to stop outside, but as soon as I unlocked the door he

brushed past me and entered. My man, who did not sleep on the premises, had left the light burning in the little hall.

"Lock the door," he said in a tone of authority. "Forgive me taking charge, but I assure you it is important."

Then to my amazement he peeled off the sopping overcoat, and kicked off his disreputable shoes. They were odd shoes, for what looked like his toes sticking out was really part of the make-up. He stood up before me in underclothes and socks, and I noticed that his underclothing seemed to be of the finest material.

"Now for your telephone," he said.

I was getting angry at these liberties.

"Who the devil are you?" I demanded.

"I am President Pelem," he said, with all the dignity in the world. "And you?"

"I?—oh, I am the German Emperor."

He laughed. "You know you invited me here," he said. "You've brought this on yourself." Then he stared at me. "Hullo, I've seen you before. You're Leithen. I saw you play at Lord's. I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. . . . Now for the telephone."

There was something about the fellow, something defiant and debonair and young, that stopped all further protest on my part. He might or might not be President Pelem, but he was certainly not a wastrel. Besides he seemed curiously keyed up, as if the occasion were desperately important, and he infected me with the same feeling. I said no more, but led the way into my sitting-room. He flung himself on the telephone, gave

a number, was instantly connected, and began a conversation in monosyllables.

It was a queer jumble that I overheard. Bryanston Square was mentioned, and the Park, and the number of my house was given—to somebody. There was a string of foreign names—Pedro and Alejandro and Manuel and Alcaza—and short breathless inquiries. Then I heard—"a good fellow—looks as if he might be useful in a row," and I wondered if he was referring to me. Some rapid Spanish followed, and then, "Come round at once—they will be here before you. Have policemen below, but don't let them come up. We should be able to manage alone. Oh, and tell Burton to ring up here as soon as he has news." And he gave my telephone number.

I put some coals on the fire, changed into a tweed jacket, and lit a pipe. I fetched a dressing-gown from my bedroom and flung it on the sofa. "You'd better put that on," I said when he had finished.

He shook his head.

"I would rather be unencumbered," he said. "But I should dearly love a cigarette . . . and a liqueur brandy, if you have such a thing. That Park of yours is infernally chilly."

I supplied his needs, and he stretched himself in an arm-chair, with his stockinged feet to the fire.

"You have been very good-humoured, Leithen," he said. "Valdez—that's my aide-de-camp—will be here presently, and he will probably be preceded by other guests. But I think I have time for the short explanation which is your due. You believe what I told you?"

I nodded.

"Good. Well, I came to London three weeks ago to raise a loan. That was a matter of life or death for my big stupid country. I have succeeded. This afternoon the agreement was signed. I think I mentioned the amount to you—five million sterling."

He smiled happily and blew a smoke-ring into the air.

"I must tell you that I have enemies. Among my happy people there are many rascals, and I had to deal harshly with them. 'So foul a sky clears not without a storm'—that's Shakespeare, isn't it? I learned it at school. You see, I had Holy Church behind me, and therefore I had against me all the gentry who call themselves liberators. Red Masons, anarchists, communists, that sort of crew. A good many are now reposing beneath the sod, but some of the worst remain. In particular, six followed me to England with instructions that I must not return.

"I don't mind telling you, Leithen, that I have had a peculiarly rotten time the last three weeks. It was most important that nothing should happen to me till the loan was settled, so I had to lead the sheltered life. It went against the grain, I assure you, for I prefer the offensive to the defensive. The English police were very amiable, and I never stirred without a cordon, your people and my own. The Six wanted to kill me, and as it is pretty easy to kill anybody if you don't mind being killed yourself, we had to take rather elaborate precautions. As it was, I was twice nearly done in. Once my carriage broke down

mysteriously, and a crowd collected, and if I hadn't had the luck to board a passing cab, I should have had a knife in my ribs. The second was at a public dinner—something not quite right about the cayenne pepper served with the oysters. One of my staff is still seriously ill."

He stretched his arms.

"Well, that first stage is over. They can't wreck the loan, whatever happens to me. Now I am free to adopt different tactics and take the offensive. I have no fear of the Six in my own country. There I can take precautions, and they will find it difficult to cross the frontier or to live for six hours thereafter if they succeed. But here you are a free people, and protection is not so easy. I do not wish to leave England just yet—I have done my work and have earned a little play. I know your land and love it, and I look forward to seeing something of my friends. Also I want to attend the Grand National. Therefore, it is necessary that my enemies should be confined for a little, while I take my holiday. So for this evening I made a plan. I took the offensive. I deliberately put myself in their danger."

He turned his dancing eyes towards me, and I have rarely had such an impression of wild and mirthful audacity.

"We have an excellent intelligence system," he went on, "and the Six have been assiduously shadowed. But as I have told you, no precautions avail against the fanatic, and I do not wish to be killed on my little holiday. So I resolved to draw their fire—to expose myself as ground bait, so to speak, that I might have the chance of netting

them. The Six usually hunt in couples, so it was necessary to have three separate acts in the play, if all were to be gathered in. The first——

"Was in Bryanston Square," I put in, "outside Lady Nantley's house?"

"True. How did you know?"

"I have just been dining there, and heard that you were expected. I saw the crowd in the square as I came away."

"It seems to have gone off quite nicely. We took pains to let it be known where I was dining. The Six, who mistrust me, delegated only two of their number for the job. They never put all their eggs in one basket. The two gentlemen were induced to make a scene, and, since they proved to be heavily armed, were taken into custody and may get a six months' sentence. Very prettily managed, but unfortunately it was the two that matter least—the ones we call Little Pedro and Alejandro the Scholar. Impatient, blundering children, both of them. That leaves four."

The telephone bell rang, and he made a long arm for the receiver. The news he got seemed to be good, for he turned a smiling face to me.

"I should have said two. My little enterprise in the Park has proved a brilliant success. . . . But I must explain. I was to be the bait for my enemies, so I showed myself to the remaining four. That was really rather a clever piece of business. They lost me at the Marble Arch and they did not recognise me as the scarecrow sitting on the seat in the rain. But they knew I had gone to earth there, and they stuck to the scent like terriers. Presently they would have found me

and there would have been shooting. Some of my own people were in the shadow between the road and the railings."

"When I saw you, were your enemies near?" I asked.

"Two were on the opposite side of the road. One was standing under the lamp-post at the gate. I don't know where the fourth was at that moment. But all had passed me more than once. . . . By the way, you very nearly got yourself shot, you know. When you asked me if sixpence was any good to me. . . . That happens to be their password. I take great credit to myself for seeing instantly that you were harmless."

"Why did you leave the Park if you had your trap so well laid?" I asked.

"Because it meant dealing with all four together at once, and I do them the honour of being rather nervous about them. They are very quick with their guns. I wanted a chance to break up the covey, and your arrival gave it me. When I went off two followed, as I thought they would. My car was in Park Lane, and gave me a lift; and one of them saw me in it. I puzzled them a little, but by now they must be certain. You see, my car has been waiting for some minutes outside this house."

"What about the other two?" I asked.

"Burton has just telephoned that they have been gathered in. Quite an exciting little scrap. To your police it must have seemed a bad case of highway robbery—two ruffianly looking fellows hold up a peaceful elderly gentleman returning from dinner. The odds were not quite like that,

but the men I had on the job are old soldiers of the Indian wars and can move softly. . . . I only wish I knew which two they have got. Burton was not sure. Alcaza is one, but I can't be certain about the other. I hope it is not the Irishman."

My bell rang very loud and steadily.

"In a few seconds I shall have solved that problem," he said gaily. "I am afraid I must trouble you to open the door, Leithen."

"Is it your aide-de-camp?"

"No. I instructed Valdez to knock. It is the residuum of the Six. Now, listen to me, my friend. These two, whoever they are, have come here to kill me, and I don't mean to be killed. . . . My first plan was to have Valdez here—and others—so that my two enemies should walk into a trap. But I changed my mind before I telephoned. They are very clever men and by this time they will be very wary. So I have thought of something else."

The bell rang again and a third time insistently.

"Take these," and he held out a pair of cruel little bluish revolvers. "When you open the door, you will say that the President is at home and, in token of his confidence, offers them these. '*Une espèce d'Irlandais, Messieurs. Vous commencez trop tard, et vous finissez trop tôt.*' Then bring them here. Quick now. I hope Corbally is one of them."

I did exactly as I was told. I cannot say that I had any liking for the task, but I was a good deal under the spell of that calm young man, and I was resigned to my flat being made a rendezvous for desperadoes. I had locked and chained and

bolted the door, so it took me a few moments to open it.

I found myself looking at emptiness.

"Who is it?" I called. "Who rang?"

I was answered from behind me. It was the quickest thing I have ever seen, for they must have slipped through in the moment when my eyes were dazzled by the change from the dim light of the hall to the glare of the landing. That gave me some notion of the men we had to deal with.

"Here," said the voice. I turned and saw two men in waterproofs and felt hats, who kept their hands in their pockets and had a fraction of an eye on the two pistols I swung by the muzzles.

"M. le Président will be glad to see you, gentlemen," I said. I held out the revolvers, which they seemed to grasp and flick into their pockets with a single movement. Then I repeated slowly the piece of rudeness in French.

One of the men laughed. "Ramon does not forget," he said. He was a young man with sandy hair and hot blue eyes and an odd break in his long drooping nose. The other was a wiry little fellow, with a grizzled beard and what looked like a stiff leg.

I had no guess at my friend's plan, and was concerned to do precisely as I was told. I opened the door of my sitting-room, and noticed that the President was stretched on my sofa facing the door. He was smoking and was still in his underclothes. When the two men behind me saw that he was patently unarmed they slipped into the room with a quick cat-like movement, and took their stand with their backs against the door.

"Hullo, Corbally," said the President pleasantly. "And you, Manuel. You're looking younger than when I saw you last. Have a cigarette?" and he nodded towards my box on the table behind him. Both shook their heads.

"I'm glad you have come. You have probably seen the news of the loan in the evening papers. That should give you a holiday, as it gives me one. No further need for the hectic oversight of each other, which is so wearing and takes up so much time."

"No," said the man called Manuel, and there was something very grim about his quiet tones. "We shall take steps to prevent any need for that in the future."

"Tut, tut—that is your old self, Manuel. You are too fond of melodrama to be an artist. You are a priest at heart."

The man snarled. "There will be no priest at your death-bed." Then to his companion. "Let us get this farce over."

The President paid not the slightest attention but looked steadily at the Irishman. "You used to be a sportsman, Mike. Have you come to share Manuel's taste for potting the sitting rabbit?"

"We are not sportsmen, we are executioners of justice," said Manuel.

The President laughed merrily. "Superb! The best Roman manner." He still kept his eyes on Corbally.

"Damn you, what's your game, Ramon?" the Irishman asked. His freckled face had become very red.

"Simply to propose a short armistice. I want

a holiday. If you must know, I want to go to the National."

"So do I."

"Well, let's call a truce. Say for two months or till I leave England—whichever period shall be the shorter. After that you can get busy again."

The one he had named Manuel broke into a spluttering torrent of Spanish, and for a little they all talked that language. It sounded like a commination service on the President, to which he good-humouredly replied. I had never seen this class of ruffian before, to whom murder was as simple as shooting a partridge, and I noted curiously the lean hands, the restless wary eyes, and the ugly lips of the type. So far as I could make out, the President seemed to be getting on well with the Irishman but to be having trouble with Manuel.

"Have ye really and truly nothing on ye?" Corbally asked.

The President stretched his arms and revealed his slim figure in its close-fitting pants and vest.

"Nor him there?" and he nodded towards me.

"He is a lawyer; he doesn't use guns."

"Then I'm damned if I touch ye. Two months it is. What's your fancy for Liverpool?"

This was too much for Manuel. I saw in what seemed to be one movement his hand slip from his pocket, Corbally's arm swing in a circle, and a plaster bust of Julius Cæsar tumble off the top of my bookcase. Then I heard the report.

"Ye nasty little man," said Corbally as he pressed him to his bosom in a bear's hug.

"You are a traitor," Manuel shouted. "How

will we face the others? What will Alejandro say and Alcaza——?”

“I think I can explain,” said the President pleasantly. “They won’t know for quite a time, and then only if you tell them. You two gentlemen are all that remain for the moment of your patriotic company. The other four have been the victims of the English police—two in Bryanston Square, and two in the Park close to the Marble Arch.”

“Ye don’t say!” said Corbally with admiration in his voice. “Faith, that’s smart work!”

“They too will have a little holiday. A few months to meditate on politics, while you and I go to the Grand National.”

Suddenly there was a sharp rat-tat at my door. It was like the knocking in *Macbeth* for dramatic effect. Corbally had one pistol at my ear in an instant, while a second covered the President.

“It’s all right,” said the latter, never moving a muscle. “It’s General Valdez, whom I think you know. That was another argument which I was coming to if I hadn’t had the good fortune to appeal to Mr. Corbally’s higher nature. I know you have sworn to kill me, but I take it that the killer wants to have a sporting chance of escape. Well, there wouldn’t have been the faintest shadow of a chance here. Valdez is at the door, and the English police are below. You are brave men, I know, but even brave men dislike the cold gallows.”

The knocker fell again. “Let him in, Leithen,” I was told, “or he will be damaging your valuable door. He has not the northern phlegm of you and me and Mr. Corbally.”

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A tall man in an ulster, which looked as if it covered a uniform, stood on the threshold. Someone had obscured the lights on the landing so that the staircase was dark, but I could see in the gloom other figures. "President Pelem," he began . . .

"The President is here," I said. "Quite well and in great form. He is entertaining two other guests."

The General marched to my sitting-room. I was behind him and did not see his face, but I can believe that it showed surprise when he recognised the guests. Manuel stood sulkily defiant, his hands in his waterproof pockets, but Corbally's light eyes were laughing.

"I think you know each other," said the President graciously.

"My God!" Valdez seemed to choke at the sight. "These swine! . . . Excellency, I have——"

"You have nothing of the kind. These are friends of mine for the next two months, and Mr. Corbally and I are going to the Grand National together. Will you have the goodness to conduct them downstairs and explain to the inspector of police below that all has gone well and that I am perfectly satisfied, and that he will hear from me in the morning? . . . One moment. What about a stirrup-cup? Leithen, does your establishment run to a whisky and soda all round?"

It did. We all had a drink, and I believe I clinked glasses with Manuel.

I looked in at Lady Samplar's dance as I had meant to. Presently I saw a resplendent figure arrive—the President, with the ribbon of the Gold

Star of Bolivar across his chest. He was no more the larky undergraduate, but the responsible statesman, the father of his country. There was a considerable crowd in his vicinity when I got near him and he was making his apologies to Mollie Nantley. She saw me and insisted on introducing me. "I so much wanted you two to meet. I had hoped it would be at my dinner—but anyhow I have managed it." I think she was a little surprised when the President took my hand in both of his. "I saw Mr. Leithen play at Lord's in '97," he said. "I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. It is delightful to make his acquaintance, I shall never forget this meeting."

"How English he is!" Mollie whispered to me as we made our way out of the crowd.

They got him next year. They were bound to, for in that kind of business you can have no real protection. But he managed to set his country on its feet before he went down. . . . No, it was neither Manuel nor Corbally. I think it was Alejandro the Scholar.

THE POWER-HOUSE

Samam yai Pyar ka Bahar key yai
Aysay main hile may qoom key yai
Aysay main dur Jadoo Nagar key
chorr ka.

See its translation
on page 14.

THE POWER-HOUSE

We were at Glenaicill—six of us—for the duck-shooting, when Leithen told us this story. Since five in the morning we had been out on the skerries, and had been blown home by a wind which threatened to root the house and its wind-blown woods from their precarious lodgment on the hill. A vast nondescript meal, luncheon and dinner in one, had occupied us till the last daylight departed, and we settled ourselves in the smoking-room for a sleepy evening of talk and tobacco.

Conversation, I remember, turned on some of Jim's trophies which grinned at us from the firelit walls, and we began to spin hunting yarns. Then Hoppy Bynge, who was killed next year on the Bramaputra, told us some queer things about his doings in New Guinea, where he tried to climb Carstensz, and lived for six months in mud. Jim said he couldn't abide mud—anything was better than a country where your boots rotted. (He was to get enough of it later in the Ypres Salient.) You know how one tale begets another, and soon the whole place hummed with odd recollections, for five of us had been a good deal about the world.

All except Leithen, the man who was afterwards Solicitor-General, and, they say, will get to the Wool-sack in time. I don't suppose he had ever been farther from home than Monte Carlo, but he liked hearing about the ends of the earth.

Jim had just finished a fairly steep yarn about his experiences on a Boundary Commission near Lake Chad, and Leithen got up to find a drink.

"Lucky devils," he said. "You've had all the fun out of life. I've had my nose to the grindstone ever since I left school."

I said something about his having had all the honour and glory.

"All the same," he went on, "I once played the chief part in a rather exciting business without ever once budging from London. And the joke of it was that the man who went out to look for adventure only saw a bit of the game, and I who sat in my chambers saw it all and pulled the strings. 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' you know."

Then he told us this story. The version I give is one he afterwards wrote down, when he had looked up his diary for some of the details.

II: BEGINNING OF THE WILD-GOOSE CHASE

IT all started one afternoon early in May when I came out of the House of Commons with Tommy Deloraine. I had got in by an accident at a by-election, when I was supposed to be fighting a forlorn hope, and as I was just beginning to be busy at the Bar I found my hands pretty full. It was before Tommy succeeded, in the days when he sat for the family seat in Yorkshire, and that afternoon he was in a powerful bad temper. Out of doors it was jolly spring weather; there was greenery in Parliament Square and bits of gay colour, and a light wind was blowing up from the river. Inside a dull debate was winding on, and an

advertising member had been trying to get up a row with the Speaker. The contrast between the frowsy place and the cheerful world outside would have impressed even the soul of a Government Whip.

Tommy sniffed the spring breeze like a supercilious stag.

"This about finishes me," he groaned. "What a juggins I am to be mouldering here! Joggleberry is the celestial limit, what they call in happier lands the pink penultimate. And the frowst on those back benches! Was there ever such a moth-eaten old museum?"

"It is the Mother of Parliaments," I observed.

"Damned monkey-house," said Tommy. "I must get off for a bit or I'll bonnet Joggleberry, or get up and propose a national monument to Guy Fawkes or something silly."

I did not see him for a day or two, and then one morning he rang me up and peremptorily summoned me to dine with him. I went, knowing very well what I should find. Tommy was off next day to shoot lions on the Equator, or something equally unconscientious. He was a bad acquaintance for a placid, sedentary soul like me, for though he could work like a Trojan when the fit took him, he was never at the same job very long. In the same week he would harass an Under-Secretary about horses for the Army, write voluminously to the press about a gun he had invented for potting aeroplanes, give a fancy-dress ball which he forgot to attend, and get into the semi-final of the racquets championship. I waited daily to see him start a new religion.

That night, I recollect, he had an odd assortment of guests. A Cabinet Minister was there, a gentle being for whom Tommy professed public scorn and private affection ; a sailor ; an Indian cavalry fellow ; Chapman, the Labour member, whom Tommy called Chipmunk ; myself, and old Milson of the Treasury. Our host was in tremendous form, chaffing everybody, and sending Chipmunk into great rolling gusts of merriment. The two lived adjacent in Yorkshire, and on platforms abused each other like pickpockets.

Tommy enlarged on the misfits of civilised life. He maintained that none of us, except perhaps the sailor and the cavalryman, were at our proper jobs. He would have had Wytham—that was the Minister—a cardinal of the Roman Church, and he said that Milson should have been the Warden of a college full of port and prejudice. Me he was kind enough to allocate to some reconstructed Imperial General Staff, merely because I had a craze for military history. Tommy's perception did not go very deep. He told Chapman he should have been a lumberman in California. " You'd have made an uncommon good logger, Chipmunk, and you know you're a dashed bad politician."

When questioned about himself he became reticent, as the newspapers say. " I doubt if I'm much good at any job," he confessed, " except to ginger up my friends. Anyhow I'm getting out of this hole. Paired for the rest of the session with a chap who has lockjaw. I'm off to stretch my legs and get back my sense of proportion."

Some one asked him where he was going, and

was told "Venezuela, to buy Government bonds and look for birds' nests."

Nobody took Tommy seriously, so his guests did not trouble to bid him the kind of farewell a prolonged journey would demand. But when the others had gone, and we were sitting in the little back smoking-room on the first floor, he became solemn. Portentously solemn, for he wrinkled up his brows and dropped his jaw in the way he had when he fancied he was in earnest.

"I've taken on a queer job, Leithen," he said, "and I want you to hear about it. None of my family know, and I would like to leave some one behind me who could get on to my tracks if things got troublesome."

I braced myself for some preposterous confidence, for I was experienced in Tommy's vagaries. But I own to being surprised when he asked me if I remembered Pitt-Heron.

I remembered Pitt-Heron very well. He had been at Oxford with me, but he was no great friend of mine, though for about two years Tommy and he had been inseparable. He had had a prodigious reputation for cleverness with everybody but the college authorities, and used to spend his vacations doing mad things in the Alps and the Balkans, and writing about them in the popular press. He was enormously rich—cotton-mills and Liverpool ground-rents—and being without a father, did pretty much what his fantastic taste dictated. He was rather a hero for a bit after he came down, for he had made some wild journey in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan, and written an exciting book about it.

Then he married a pretty cousin of Tommy's, who happened to be the only person that ever captured my stony heart, and settled down in London. I did not go to their house, and soon I found that very few of his friends saw much of him either. His travels and magazine articles suddenly stopped, and I put it down to the common course of successful domesticity. Apparently I was wrong.

"Charles Pitt-Heron," said Tommy, "is blowing up for a most thundering mess."

I asked what kind of mess, and Tommy said he didn't know. "That's the mischief of it. You remember the wild beggar he used to be, always off on the spree to the Mountains of the Moon or somewhere. Well, he has been damping down his fires lately, and trying to behave like a respectable citizen, but God knows what he has been thinking! I go a good deal to Portman Square, and all last year he has been getting queerer."

Questions as to the nature of the queerness only elicited the fact that Pitt-Heron had taken to science with some enthusiasm.

"He has got a laboratory at the back of the house—used to be the billiard-room—where he works away half the night. And Lord! The crew you meet there! Every kind of heathen—Chinese and Turks, and long-haired chaps from Russia, and fat Germans. I've several times blundered into the push. They've all got an odd secretive air about them, and Charles is becoming like them. He won't answer a plain question or look you straight in the face. Ethel sees it too, and she has often talked to me about it."

I said I saw no harm in such a hobby.

"I do," said Tommy grimly. "Anyhow, the fellow has bolted."

"What on earth——" I began, but was cut short.

"Bolted without a word to a mortal soul. He told Ethel he would be home for luncheon yesterday, and never came. His man knew nothing about him, hadn't packed for him or anything; but he found he had stuffed some things into a kit-bag and gone out by the back through the mews. Ethel was in terrible straits and sent for me, and I ranged all yesterday afternoon like a wolf on the scent. I found he had drawn a biggish sum in gold from the bank, but I couldn't find any trace of where he had gone.

"I was just setting out for Scotland Yard this morning when Tomlin, the valet, rang me up and said he had found a card in the waistcoat of the dress clothes that Charles had worn the night before he left. It had a name on it like Konalevsky, and it struck me that they might know something about the business at the Russian Embassy. Well, I went round there, and the long and short of it was that I found there was a fellow of that name among the clerks. I saw him, and he said he had gone to see Mr. Pitt-Heron two days before with a letter from some Embassy chap. Unfortunately the man in question had gone off to New York next day, but Konalevsky told me one thing which helped to clear up matters. It seemed that the letter had been one of those passports that Embassies give to their friends—a higher-powered sort than the ordinary make—and Konalevsky gathered from something he had heard that Charles was aiming at Moscow."

Tommy paused to let his news sink in.

"Well, that was good enough for me. I'm off to-morrow to run him to ground."

"But why shouldn't a man go to Moscow if he wants?" I said feebly.

"You don't understand," said the sage Tommy. "You don't know old Charles as I know him. He's got into a queer set, and there's no knowing what mischief he's up to. He's perfectly capable of starting a revolution in Armenia or somewhere merely to see how it feels like to be a revolutionary. That's the damned thing about the artistic temperament. Anyhow, he's got to chuck it. I won't have Ethel scared to death by his whims. I am going to hale him back from Moscow, even if I have to pretend he's an escaped lunatic. He's probably like one enough by this time if he has taken no clothes."

I have forgotten what I said, but it was some plea for caution. I could not see the reason for these heroics. Pitt-Heron did not interest me greatly, and the notion of Tommy as a defender of the hearth amused me. I thought that he was working on very slight evidence, and would probably make a fool of himself.

"It's only another of the man's fads," I said. "He never could do things like an ordinary mortal. What possible trouble could there be? Money?"

"Rich as Cræsus," said Tommy.

"A woman?"

"Blind as a bat to female beauty."

"The wrong side of the law?"

"Don't think so. He could settle any ordinary scrawl with a cheque."

"Then I give it up. Whatever it is, it looks as if Pitt-Heron would have a companion in misfortune before you are done with the business. I'm all for you taking a holiday, for at present you are a nuisance to your friends and a disgrace to your country's legislature. But for goodness' sake curb your passion for romance. They don't like it in Russia."

Next morning Tommy turned up to see me in chambers. The prospect of travel always went to his head like wine. He was in wild spirits, and had forgotten his anger at the defaulting Pitt-Heron in gratitude for his provision of an occupation. He talked of carrying him off to the Caucasus when he had found him, to investigate the habits of the Caucasian stag.

I remember the scene as if it were yesterday. It was a hot May morning, and the sun which came through the dirty window in Fountain Court lit up the dust and squalor of my working chambers. I was pretty busy at the time, and my table was well nourished with briefs. Tommy picked up one and began to read it. It was about a new drainage scheme in West Ham. He tossed it down and looked at me pityingly.

"Poor old beggar!" he said. "To spend your days on such work when the world is chock-full of amusing things. Life goes roaring by and you only hear the echo in your stuffy rooms. You can hardly see the sun for the cobwebs on these windows of yours. Charles is a fool, but I'm blessed if he isn't wiser than you. Don't you wish you were coming with me?"

The queer thing was that I did. I remember

the occasion, as I have said, for it was one of the few on which I have had a pang of dissatisfaction with the calling I had chosen. As Tommy's footsteps grew faint on the stairs I suddenly felt as if I were missing something, as if somehow I were out of it. It is an unpleasant feeling even when you know that the thing you are out of is foolishness.

Tommy went off at 11 from Victoria, and my work was pretty well ruined for the day. I felt oddly restless, and the cause was not merely Tommy's departure. My thoughts kept turning to the Pitt-Herons—chiefly to Ethel, that adorable child unequally yoked to a perverse egoist, but a good deal to the egoist himself. I have never suffered much from whimsies, but I suddenly began to feel a curious interest in the business—an unwilling interest, for I found it in my heart to regret my robust scepticism of the night before. And it was more than interest. I had a sort of presentiment that I was going to be mixed up in the affair more than I wanted. I told myself angrily that the life of an industrious common-law barrister could have little to do with the wanderings of two maniacs in Muscovy. But, try as I might, I could not get rid of the obsession. That night it followed me into my dreams, and I saw myself with a knout coercing Tommy and Pitt-Heron in a Russian fortress which faded away into the Carlton Hotel.

Next afternoon I found my steps moving in the direction of Portman Square. I lived at the time in Down Street, and I told myself I would be none the worse of a walk in the Park before dinner.

I had a fancy to see Mrs. Pitt-Heron, for, though I had only met her twice since her marriage, there had been a day when we were the closest of friends.

I found her alone, a perplexed and saddened lady with imploring eyes. Those eyes questioned me as to how much I knew. I told her presently that I had seen Tommy and was aware of his errand. I was moved to add that she might count on me if there were anything she wished done on this side of the Channel.

She was very little changed. There was still the old exquisite slimness, the old shy courtesy. But she told me nothing. Charles was full of business and becoming very forgetful. She was sure the Russian journey was all a stupid mistake. He probably thought he had told her of his departure. He would write; she expected a letter by every post.

But her haggard eyes belied her optimism. I could see that there had been odd happenings of late in the Pitt-Heron household. She either knew or feared something; the latter, I thought, for her air was more of apprehension than of painful enlightenment.

I did not stay long, and, as I walked home, I had an awkward feeling that I had intruded. Also I was increasingly certain that there was trouble brewing, and that Tommy had more warrant for his journey than I had given him credit for. I cast my mind back to gather recollections of Pitt-Heron, but all I could find was an impression of a brilliant, uncomfortable being, who had been too fond of the byways of life for my sober tastes. There was nothing crooked in him in the wrong

sense, but there might be a good deal that was perverse. I remember consoling myself with the thought that, though he might shatter his wife's nerves by his vagaries, he would scarcely break her heart.

To be watchful, I decided, was my business. And I could not get rid of the feeling that I might soon have cause for all my vigilance.

III: I FIRST HEAR OF MR. ANDREW LUMLEY

A FORTNIGHT later—to be accurate, on the 21st of May—I did a thing I rarely do, and went down to South London on a County Court case. It was an ordinary taxi-cab accident, and, as the solicitors for the company were good clients of mine and the regular County Court junior was ill in bed, I took the case to oblige them. There was the usual dull conflict of evidence. An empty taxi-cab, proceeding slowly on the right side of the road and hooting decorously at the corners, had been run into by a private motor-car which had darted down a side street. The taxi had been swung round and its bonnet considerably damaged, while its driver had suffered a dislocated shoulder. The bad feature in the case was that the motor-car had not halted to investigate the damage, but had proceeded unconscientiously on its way, and the assistance of the London police had been called in to trace it. It turned out to be the property of a Mr. Julius Pavia, a retired East India merchant, who lived in a large villa in the neighbourhood of Blackheath, and at the time of the accident it had been occupied by his butler. The company

brought an action for damages against its owner.

The butler, Tuke by name, was the only witness for the defence. He was a tall man, with a very long, thin face, and a jaw the two parts of which seemed scarcely to fit. He was profuse in his apologies on behalf of his master, who was abroad. It seemed that on the morning in question—it was the 8th of May—he had received instructions from Mr. Pavia to convey a message to a passenger by the Continental express from Victoria, and had been hot on this errand when he met the taxi. He was not aware that there had been any damage, thought it only a slight grazing of the two cars, and on his master's behalf consented to the judgment of the court.

It was a commonplace business, but Tuke was by no means a commonplace witness. He was very unlike the conventional butler, much liker one of those successful financiers whose portraits you see in the picture papers. His little eyes were quick with intelligence, and there were lines of ruthlessness around his mouth, like those of a man often called to decisive action. His story was simplicity itself, and he answered my questions with an air of serious candour. The train he had to meet was the 11 a.m. from Victoria, the train by which Tommy had travelled. The passenger he had to see was an American gentleman, Mr. Wright Davies. His master, Mr. Pavia, was in Italy, but would shortly be home again.

The case was over in twenty minutes, but it was something unique in my professional experience. For I took a most intense and unreasoning dislike to that bland butler. I cross-examined with some

rudeness, was answered with steady courtesy, and hopelessly snubbed. The upshot was that I lost my temper, to the surprise of the County Court judge. All the way back I was both angry and ashamed of myself. Half-way home I realised that the accident had happened on the very day that Tommy left London. The coincidence merely flickered across my mind, for there could be no earthly connection between the two events.

That afternoon I wasted some time in looking up Pavia in the Directory. He was there sure enough as the occupier of a suburban mansion called the White Lodge. He had no city address, so it was clear that he was out of business. My irritation with the man had made me inquisitive about the master. It was a curious name he bore, possibly Italian, possibly Goanese. I wondered how he got on with his highly competent butler. If Tuke had been my servant I would have wrung his neck or bolted before a week was out.

Have you ever noticed that, when you hear a name that strikes you, you seem to be constantly hearing it for a bit? Once I had a case in which one of the parties was called Jubber, a name I had never met before, but I ran across two other Jubbers before the case was over. Anyhow, the day after the Blackheath visit I was briefed in a big Stock Exchange case, which turned on the true ownership of certain bearer bonds. It was a complicated business, which I need not trouble you with, and it involved a number of consultations with my lay clients, a famous firm of brokers. They produced their books, and my chambers were filled with glossy gentlemen talking a strange jargon.

I had to examine my clients closely on their practice in treating a certain class of bearer security, and they were very frank in expounding their business. I was not surprised to hear that Pitt-Heron was one of the most valued names on their lists. With his wealth he was bound to be a good deal in the City. Now I had no desire to pry into Pitt-Heron's private affairs, especially his financial arrangements, but his name was in my thoughts at the time, and I could not help looking curiously at what was put before me. He seemed to have been buying these bonds on a big scale. I had the indiscretion to ask if Mr. Pitt-Heron had long followed this course, and was told that he had begun to purchase some six months before.

"Mr. Pitt-Heron," volunteered the stockbroker, "is very closely connected in his financial operations with another esteemed client of ours, Mr. Julius Pavia. They are both attracted by this class of security."

At the moment I scarcely noted the name, but after dinner that night I began to speculate about the connection. I had found out the name of one of Charles's mysterious new friends.

It was not a very promising discovery. A retired East India merchant did not suggest anything wildly speculative, but I began to wonder if Charles's preoccupation, to which Tommy had been witness, might not be connected with financial worries. I could not believe that the huge Pitt-Heron fortunes had been seriously affected, or that his flight was that of a defaulter, but he might have got entangled in some shady city business which preyed on his sensitive soul. Somehow or other

are
your friend
you want my
name see
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I could not believe that Mr. Pavia was a wholly innocent old gentleman; his butler looked too formidable. It was possible that he was blackmailing Pitt-Heron, and that the latter had departed to get out of his clutches.

But on what ground? I had no notion as to the blackmailable thing that might lurk in Charles's past, and the guesses which flitted through my brain were too fantastic to consider seriously. After all, I had only the flimsiest basis for conjecture. Pavia and Pitt-Heron were friends; Tommy had gone off in quest of Pitt-Heron; Pavia's butler had broken the law of the land in order, for some reason or other, to see the departure of the train by which Tommy had travelled. I remember laughing at myself for my suspicions, and reflecting that, if Tommy could see into my head, he would turn a deaf ear in the future to my complaints of his lack of balance.

But the thing stuck in my mind, and I called again that week on Mrs. Pitt-Heron. She had had no word from her husband, and only a bare line from Tommy, giving his Moscow address. Poor child, it was a wretched business for her. She had to keep a smiling face to the world, invent credible tales to account for her husband's absence, and all the while anxiety and dread were gnawing at her heart. I asked her if she had ever met a Mr. Pavia, but the name was unknown to her. She knew nothing of Charles's business dealings, but at my request she interviewed his bankers, and I heard from her next day that his affairs were in perfect order. It was no financial crisis which had precipitated him abroad.

A few days later I stumbled by the merest accident upon what sailors call a "cross-bearing." At the time I used to "devil" a little for the Solicitor-General, and "note" cases sent to him from the different Government offices. It was thankless work, but it was supposed to be good for an ambitious lawyer. By this prosaic channel I received the first hint of another of Charles's friends.

I had sent me one day the papers dealing with the arrest of a German spy at Plymouth, for at the time there was a sort of epidemic of roving Teutons, who got themselves into compromising situations, and gravely troubled the souls of the Admiralty and the War Office. This case was distinguished from the common ruck by the higher social standing of the accused. Generally the spy is a photographer or bagman who attempts to win the bibulous confidence of minor officials. But this specimen was no less than a professor of a famous German university, a man of excellent manners, wide culture, and attractive presence, who had dined with Port officers and danced with Admirals' daughters.

I have forgotten the evidence, or what was the legal point submitted for the Law Officers' opinion; in any case it matters little, for he was acquitted. What interested me at the time were the testimonials as to character which he carried with him. He had many letters of introduction. One was from Pitt-Heron to his wife's sailor uncle; and when he was arrested one Englishman went so far as to wire that he took upon himself the whole costs of the defence. This gentleman was a Mr.

Andrew Lumley, stated in the papers sent me to be a rich bachelor, a member of the Athenæum and Carlton Clubs, and a dweller in the Albany.

Remember that, till a few weeks before, I had known nothing of Pitt-Heron's circle, and here were three bits of information dropping in on me unsolicited, just when my interest had been awakened. I began to get really keen, for every man at the bottom of his heart believes that he is a born detective. I was on the look-out for Charles's infrequent friends, and I argued that if he knew the spy and the spy knew Mr. Lumley, the odds were that Pitt-Heron and Lumley were acquaintances. I hunted up the latter in the Red Book. Sure enough he lived in the Albany, belonged to half a dozen clubs, and had a country house in Hampshire.

I tucked the name away in a pigeon-hole of my memory, and for some days asked every one I met if he knew the philanthropist of the Albany. I had no luck till the Saturday, when, lunching at the club, I ran against Jenkinson, the art critic.

I forget if you know that I have always been a bit of a connoisseur in a mild way. I used to dabble in prints and miniatures, but at that time my interest lay chiefly in Old Wedgwood, of which I had collected some good pieces. Old Wedgwood is a thing which few people collect seriously, but the few who do are apt to be monomaniacs. Whenever a big collection comes into the market it fetches high prices, but it generally finds its way into not more than half a dozen hands. Wedgwoodites all know each other, and they are less cut-throat in their methods than most collectors.

Of all I have ever met Jenkinson was the keenest, and he would discourse for hours on the "feel" of good jasper, and the respective merits of blue and sage-green grounds.

That day he was full of excitement. He babbled through luncheon about the Wentworth sale, which he had attended the week before. There had been a pair of magnificent plaques, with a unique Flaxman design, which had roused his enthusiasm. Urns and medallions and what not had gone to this or that connoisseur, and Jenkinson could quote their prices, but the plaques dominated his fancy, and he was furious that the nation had not acquired them. It seemed that he had been to South Kensington and the British Museum, and all sorts of dignitaries, and he thought he might yet persuade the authorities to offer for them if the purchaser would re-sell. They had been bought by Lutrin for a well-known private collector, by name Andrew Lumley.

I pricked up my ears and asked about Mr. Lumley.

Jenkinson said he was a rich old buffer who locked up his things in cupboards and never let the public get a look at them. He suspected that a lot of the best things at recent sales had found their way to him, and that meant that they were put in cold storage for good.

I asked if he knew him.

No, he told me, but he had once or twice been allowed to look at his things for books he had been writing. He had never seen the man, for he always bought through agents, but he had heard of people who knew him. "It is the old silly game,"

he said. "He will fill half a dozen houses with priceless treasures, and then die, and the whole show will be sold at auction and the best things carried off to America. It's enough to make a patriot swear."

There was balm in Gilead, however. Mr. Lumley apparently might be willing to re-sell the Wedgwood plaques if he got a fair offer. So Jenkinson had been informed by Lutrin, and that very afternoon he was going to look at them. He asked me to come with him, and, having nothing to do, I accepted.

Jenkinson's car was waiting for us at the club door. It was closed, for the afternoon was wet. I did not hear his directions to the chauffeur, and we had been on the road ten minutes or so before I discovered that we had crossed the river and were traversing South London. I had expected to find the things in Lutrin's shop, but to my delight I was told that Lumley had taken delivery of them at once.

"He keeps very few of his things in the Albany except his books," I was told. But he has a house at Blackheath which is stuffed from cellar to garret."

"What is the name of it?" I asked with a sudden suspicion.

"The White Lodge," said Jenkinson.

"But that belongs to a man called Pavia," I said.

"I can't help that. The things in it belong to old Lumley, all right. I know, for I've been three times there with his permission."

Jenkinson got little out of me for the rest of the

ride. Here was excellent corroborative evidence of what I had allowed myself to suspect. Pavia was a friend of Pitt-Heron; Lumley was a friend of Pitt-Heron; Lumley was obviously a friend of Pavia, and he might be Pavia himself, for the retired East India merchant, as I figured him, would not be above an innocent impersonation. Anyhow, if I could find one or the other, I might learn something about Charles's recent doings. I sincerely hoped that the owner might be at home that afternoon when we inspected his treasures, for so far I had found no one who could procure me an introduction to that mysterious old bachelor of artistic and philo-Teutonic tastes.

We reached the White Lodge about half-past three. It was one of those small, square, late-Georgian mansions which you see all around London—once a country-house among fields, now only a villa in a pretentious garden. I looked to see my super-butler Tuke, but the door was opened by a female servant who inspected Jenkinson's card of admission, and somewhat unwillingly allowed us to enter.

My companion had not exaggerated when he described the place as full of treasures. It was far more like the shop of a Bond Street art-dealer than a civilised dwelling. The hall was crowded with Japanese armour and lacquer cabinets. One room was lined from floor to ceiling with good pictures, mostly seventeenth-century Dutch, and had enough Chippendale chairs to accommodate a public meeting. Jenkinson would fain have prowled round, but we were moved on by the inexorable servant to the little back room where lay the

objects of our visit. The plaques had been only half-unpacked, and in a moment Jenkinson was busy on them with a magnifying glass, purring to himself like a contented cat.

The housekeeper stood on guard by the door, Jenkinson was absorbed, and after the first inspection of the treasures I had leisure to look about me. It was an untidy little room, full of fine Chinese porcelain in dusty glass cabinets, and in a corner stood piles of old Persian rugs.

Pavia, I reflected, must be an easy-going soul, entirely oblivious of comfort, if he allowed his friend to turn his dwelling into such a pantech-nicon. Less and less did I believe in the existence of the retired East India merchant. The house was Lumley's, who chose to pass under another name during his occasional visits. His motive might be innocent enough, but somehow I did not think so. His butler had looked too infernally intelligent.

With my foot I turned over the lid of one of the packing-cases that had held the Wedgwoods. It was covered with a litter of cotton-wool and shavings, and below it lay a crumpled piece of paper. I looked again, and saw that it was a telegraph form. Clearly somebody, with the telegram in his hand, had opened the cases, and had left it on the top of one, whence it had dropped to the floor and been covered by the lid when it was flung off.

I hope and believe that I am as scrupulous as other people, but then and there came on me the conviction that I must read that telegram. I felt the gimlet eye of the housekeeper on me, so I had

recourse to craft. I took out my cigarette case as if to smoke, and clumsily upset its contents amongst the shavings. Then on my knees I began to pick them up, turning over the litter till the telegram was exposed.

It was in French, and I read it quite clearly. It had been sent from Vienna, but the address was in some code. "*Suivez a Bokhare Saronov*"—these were the words. I finished my collection of the cigarettes and turned the lid over again on the telegram, so that its owner, if he chose to look for it diligently, might find it.

When we sat in the car going home, Jenkinson absorbed in meditation on the plaques, I was coming to something like a decision. A curious feeling of inevitability possessed me. I had collected by accident a few odd, disjointed pieces of information, and here by the most amazing accident of all was the connecting link. I knew I had no evidence to go upon which would have convinced the most credulous common jury. Pavia knew Pitt-Heron; so probably did Lumley. Lumley knew Pavia, possibly was identical with him. Somebody in Pavia's house got a telegram in which a trip to Bokhara was indicated. It didn't sound much. Yet I was absolutely convinced, with the queer subconscious certitude of the human brain, that Pitt-Heron was or was about to be in Bokhara, and that Pavia-Lumley knew of his being there and was deeply concerned in his journey.

That night after dinner I rang up Mrs. Pitt-Heron.

She had had a letter from Tommy, a very dispirited letter, for he had had no luck. Nobody in

Moscow had seen or heard of any wandering Englishman remotely like Charles ; and Tommy, after playing the private detective for three weeks, was nearly at the end of his tether and spoke of returning home.

I told her to send him the following wire in her own name : "*Go on to Bokhara. Have information you will meet him there.*"

She promised to send the message next day, and asked no further questions. She was a pearl among women.

IV: TELLS OF A MIDSUMMER NIGHT

HITHERTO I had been the looker-on ; now I was to become a person of the drama. That telegram was the beginning of my active part in this curious affair. They say that everybody turns up in time at the corner of Piccadilly Circus if you wait long enough. I was to find myself like a citizen of Baghdad in the days of the great Caliph, and yet never stir from my routine of flat, chambers, club, flat.

I am wrong : there was one episode out of London, and that perhaps was the true beginning of my story.

Whitsuntide that year came very late, and I was glad of the fortnight's rest, for Parliament and the Law Courts had given me a busy time. I had recently acquired a car and a chauffeur called Stagg, and I looked forward to trying it in a tour in the West Country. But before I left London I went again to Portman Square.

I found Ethel Pitt-Heron in grave distress. You

must remember that Tommy and I had always gone on the hypothesis that Charles's departure had been in pursuance of some mad scheme of his own which might get him into trouble. We thought that he had become mixed up with highly undesirable friends, and was probably embarking in some venture which might not be criminal but was certain to be foolish. I had long rejected the idea of blackmail, and convinced myself that Lumley and Pavia were his colleagues. The same general notion, I fancy, had been in his wife's mind. But now she had found something which altered the case.

She had ransacked his papers in the hope of finding a clue to the affair which had taken him abroad, but there was nothing but business letters, notes of investments, and such-like. He seemed to have burned most of his papers in the queer laboratory at the back of the house. But, stuffed into the pocket of a blotter on a bureau in the drawing-room where he scarcely ever wrote, she had found a document. It seemed to be the rough draft of a letter, and it was addressed to her. I give it as it was written; the blank spaces were left blank in the manuscript.

" You must have thought me mad, or worse, to treat you as I have done. But there was a terrible reason, which some day I hope to tell you all about. I want you as soon as you get this to make ready to come out to me at . . . You will travel by . . . and arrive at . . . I enclose a letter which I want you to hand in deepest confidence to Knowles, the solicitor. He will make all arrangements about your journey

and about sending me the supplies of money I want. Darling, you must leave as secretly as I did, and tell nobody anything, not even that I am alive—that least of all. I would not frighten you for worlds, but I am on the edge of a horrible danger, which I hope with God's help and yours to escape . . ."

That was all—obviously the draft of a letter which he intended to post to her from some foreign place. But can you conceive a missive more calculated to shatter a woman's nerves? It filled me, I am bound to say, with heavy disquiet. Pitt-Heron was no coward, and he was not the man to make too much of a risk. Yet it was clear that he had fled that day in May under the pressure of some mortal fear.

The affair in my eyes began to look very bad. Ethel wanted me to go to Scotland Yard, but I dissuaded her. I have the utmost esteem for Scotland Yard, but I shrank from publicity at this stage. There might be something in the case too delicate for the police to handle, and I thought it better to wait.

I reflected a great deal about the Pitt-Heron business the first day or two of my trip, but the air and the swift motion helped me to forget it. We had a fortnight of superb weather, and sailed all day through a glistening green country under the hazy blue heavens of June. Soon I fell into the blissful state of physical and mental ease which such a life induces. Hard toil, such as deer-stalking, keeps the nerves on the alert and the mind active, but swimming all day in a smooth car through a heavenly landscape mesmerises brain and body.

We ran up the Thames valley, explored the Cotswolds, and turned south through Somerset till we reached the fringes of Exmoor. I stayed a day or two at a little inn high up in the moor, and spent the time tramping the endless ridges of hill or scrambling in the arbutus thickets where the moor falls in steep to the sea. We returned by Dartmoor and the south coast, meeting with our first rain in Dorset, and sweeping into sunlight again on Salisbury Plain. The time came when only two days remained to me. The car had behaved beyond all my hopes, and Stagg, a sombre and silent man, was lyrical in its praise.

I wanted to be in London by the Monday afternoon, and to ensure this I made a long day of it on the Sunday. It was the long day which brought our pride to a fall. The car had run so well that I resolved to push on and sleep in a friend's house near Farnham. It was about half past eight, and we were traversing the somewhat confused and narrow roads in the neighbourhood of Wolmer Forest, when, as we turned a sharp corner, we ran full into the tail of a heavy carrier's cart. Stagg clapped on the brakes, but the collision, though it did no harm to the cart, was sufficient to send the butt-end of something through our glass screen, damage the tyre of the near front wheel, and derange the steering-gear. Neither of us suffered much hurt, but Stagg got a long scratch on his cheek from broken glass, and I had a bruised shoulder.

The carrier was friendly but useless, and there was nothing for it but to arrange for horses to take the car to Farnham. This meant a job of some

hours, and I found on inquiry at a neighbouring cottage that there was no inn where I could stay within eight miles. Stagg borrowed a bicycle somehow and went off to collect horses, while I morosely reviewed the alternatives before me.

I did not like the prospect of spending the June night beside my derelict car, and the thought of my friend's house near Farnham beckoned me seductively. I might have walked there, but I did not know the road, and I found that my shoulder was paining me, so I resolved to try to find some gentleman's house in the neighbourhood where I could borrow a conveyance. The south of England is now so densely peopled by Londoners that even in a wild district, where there are no inns and few farms, there are certain to be several week-end cottages.

I walked along the white ribbon of road in the scented June dusk. At first it was bounded by high gorse, then came patches of open heath, and then woods. Beyond the woods I found a park-railing, and presently an entrance-gate with a lodge. It seemed to be the place I was looking for, and I woke the lodge-keeper, who thus early had retired to bed. I asked the name of the owner, but was told the name of the place instead—it was High Ashes. I asked if the owner was at home, and got a sleepy nod for answer.

The house, as seen in the half-light, was a long whitewashed cottage, rising to two storeys in the centre. It was plentifully covered with creepers and roses, and the odour of flowers was mingled with the faintest savour of wood-smoke, pleasant to a hungry traveller in the late hours. I pulled an

old-fashioned bell, and the door was opened by a stolid young parlourmaid.

I explained my errand, and offered my card. I was, I said, a Member of Parliament and of the Bar, who had suffered a motor accident. Would it be possible for the master of the house to assist me to get to my destination near Farnham? I was bidden enter, and wearily seated myself on a settle in the hall.

In a few minutes an ancient housekeeper appeared, a grim dame whom at other times I should have shunned. She bore, however, a hospitable message. There was no conveyance in the place, as the car had gone that day to London for repairs. But if I cared to avail myself of the accommodation of the house for the night it was at my service. Meantime my servant could be looking after the car, and a message would go to him to pick me up in the morning.

I gratefully accepted, for my shoulder was growing troublesome, and was conducted up a shallow oak staircase to a very pleasant bedroom with a bathroom adjoining. I had a bath, and afterwards found a variety of comforts put at my service from slippers to razors. There was also some Elliman for my wounded shoulder. Clean and refreshed I made my way downstairs and entered a room from which I caught a glow of light.

It was a library, the most attractive I think I have ever seen. The room was long, as libraries should be, and entirely lined with books, save over the fireplace, where hung a fine picture which I took to be a Raeburn. The books were in glass cases, which showed the beautiful shallow mouldings

of a more artistic age. A table was laid for dinner in a corner, for the room was immense, and the shaded candlesticks on it, along with the late June dusk, gave such light as there was. At first I thought the place was empty, but as I crossed the floor a figure rose from a deep chair by the hearth.

"Good evening, Mr. Leithen," a voice said. "It is a kindly mischance which gives a lonely old man the pleasure of your company."

He switched on an electric lamp, and I saw before me—what I had not guessed from the voice—an old man. I was thirty-four at the time, and counted anything over fifty old, but I judged my host to be well on in the sixties. He was about my own size, but a good deal bent in the shoulders, as if from study. His face was clean-shaven and extraordinarily fine, with every feature delicately chiselled. He had a sort of Hapsburg mouth and chin, very long and pointed, but modelled with a grace which made the full lower lip seem entirely right. His hair was silver, brushed so low on the forehead as to give him a slightly foreign air, and he wore tinted glasses, as if for reading.

Altogether it was a very dignified and agreeable figure who greeted me in a voice so full and soft that it belied his obvious age.

Dinner was a light meal, but perfect in its way. There were soles, I remember, an exceedingly well-cooked chicken, fresh strawberries, and a savoury. We drank a '95 Perrier-Jouet and some excellent Madeira. The stolid parlourmaid waited on us, and, as we talked of the weather and the Hampshire roads, I kept trying to guess my host's

profession. He was not a lawyer, for he had not the inevitable lines on the cheek. I thought that he might be a retired Oxford don, or one of the higher civil servants, or perhaps some official of the British Museum. His library proclaimed him a scholar, and his voice a gentleman.

Afterwards we settled ourselves in arm-chairs, and he gave me a good cigar. We talked about many things—books, the right furnishing of a library, a little politics, in deference to my M.P.-ship. My host was apathetic about party questions, but curious about defence matters, and in his way an amateur strategist. I could fancy his inditing letters to *The Times* on national service.

Then we wandered into foreign affairs, where I found his interest acute and his knowledge immense. Indeed he was so well informed that I began to suspect that my guesses had been wrong, and that he was a retired diplomat. At that time there was some difficulty between France and Italy over customs duties, and he sketched for me with remarkable clearness the weak points in the French tariff administration. I had been recently engaged in a big South American railway case, and I asked him a question about the property of my clients. He gave me a much better account than I had ever got from the solicitors who briefed me.

The fire had been lit before we finished dinner, and presently it began to burn up and light the figure of my host, who sat in a deep arm-chair. He had taken off his tinted glasses, and as I rose to get a match I saw his eyes looking abstractedly before him.

Somehow they reminded me of Pitt-Heron.

Charles had always a sort of dancing light in his, a restless intelligence which was at once attractive and disquieting. My host had this and more. His eyes were paler than I had ever seen in a human head—pale, bright, and curiously wild. But, whereas Pitt-Heron's had only given the impression of reckless youth, this man's spoke of wisdom and power as well as of endless vitality.

All my theories vanished, for I could not believe that my host had ever followed any profession. If he had, he would have been at the head of it, and the world would have been familiar with his features. I began to wonder if my recollection was not playing me false, and I was in the presence of some great man whom I ought to recognise.

As I dived into the recesses of my memory I heard his voice asking if I were not a lawyer.

I told him, Yes. A barrister with a fair common-law practice and some work in Privy Council appeals.

He asked me why I chose the profession.

"It came handiest," I said. "I am a dry creature, who loves facts and logic. I am not a flier, I have no new ideas, I don't want to lead men, and I like work. I am the ordinary educated Englishman, and my sort gravitates to the Bar. We like feeling that, if we are not the builders, at any rate we are the cement of civilisation."

He repeated the words "cement of civilisation" in his soft voice.

"In a sense you are right. But civilisation needs more than the law to hold it together. You see, all mankind are not equally willing to accept as divine justice what is called human law."

"Of course there are further sanctions," I said. "Police and armies and the goodwill of civilisation."

He caught me up quickly. "The last is your true cement. Did you ever reflect, Mr. Leithen, how precarious is the tenure of the civilisation we boast about?"

"I should have thought it fairly substantial," I said, "and the foundations grow daily firmer."

He laughed. "That is the lawyer's view, but, believe me, you are wrong. Reflect, and you will find that the foundations are sand. You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass. A touch here, a push there, and you bring back the reign of Saturn."

It was the kind of paradoxical, undergraduate speculation which grown men indulge in sometimes after dinner. I looked at my host to discover his mood, and at the moment a log flared up again.

His face was perfectly serious. His light wild eyes were intently watching me.

"Take one little instance," he said. "We are a commercial world, and have built up a great system of credit. Without our cheques and bills of exchange and currency the whole of our life would stop. But credit only exists because behind it we have a standard of value. My Bank of England notes are worthless paper unless I can get sovereigns for them if I choose. Forgive this elementary disquisition, but the point is important. We have fixed a gold standard, because gold is sufficiently rare, and because it allows itself to be coined into a portable form. I am aware that

there are economists who say that the world could be run equally well on a pure credit basis, with no metal currency at the back of it; but, however sound their argument may be in the abstract, the thing is practically impossible. You would have to convert the whole of the world's stupidity to their economic faith before it would work.

“Now, suppose something happened to make our standard of value useless. Suppose the dream of the alchemists came true, and all metals were readily transmutable. We have got very near it in recent years, as you will know if you interest yourself in chemical science. Once gold and silver lost their intrinsic value, the whole edifice of our commerce would collapse. Credit would become meaningless, because it would be untranslatable. We should be back at a bound in the age of barter, for it is hard to see what other standard of value could take the place of the precious metals. All our civilisation, with its industries and commerce, would come toppling down. Once more, like primitive man, I would plant cabbages for a living, and exchange them for services in kind from the cobbler and the butcher. We should have the simple life with a vengeance—not the self-conscious simplicity of the civilised man, but the compulsory simplicity of the savage.”

I was not greatly impressed by the illustration. “Of course there are many key-points in civilisation,” I said, “and the loss of them would bring ruin. But those keys are strongly held.”

“Not so strongly as you think. Consider how delicate the machine is growing. As life grows more complex, the machinery grows more intricate,

and therefore more vulnerable. Your so-called sanctions become so infinitely numerous that each in itself is frail. In the Dark Ages you had one great power—the terror of God and His Church. Now you have a multiplicity of small things, all delicate and fragile, and strong only by our tacit agreement not to question them.”

“You forget one thing,” I said—“the fact that men really are agreed to keep the machine going. That is what I called the ‘goodwill of civilisation.’”

He got up from his chair and walked up and down the floor, a curious dusky figure lit by the rare spurts of flame from the hearth.

“You have put your finger on the one thing that matters. Civilisation is a conspiracy. What value would your police be if every criminal could find a sanctuary across the Channel, or your law courts, if no other tribunal recognised their decisions? Modern life is the silent compact of comfortable folk to keep up pretences. And it will succeed till the day comes when there is another compact to strip them bare.”

I do not think that I have ever listened to a stranger conversation. It was not so much what he said—you will hear the same thing from any group of half-baked young men—as the air with which he said it. The room was almost dark, but the man's personality seemed to take shape and bulk in the gloom. Though I could scarcely see him, I knew that those pale strange eyes were looking at me. I wanted more light, but did not know where to look for a switch. It was all so eerie and odd that I began to wonder if my host

were not a little mad. In any case, I was tired of his speculations.

"We won't dispute on the indisputable," I said. "But I should have thought that it was the interest of all the best brains of the world to keep up what you call the conspiracy."

He dropped into his chair again.

"I wonder," he said slowly. "Do we really get the best brains working on the side of the compact? Take the business of Government. When all is said, we are ruled by the amateurs and the second-rate. The methods of our departments would bring any private firm to bankruptcy. The methods of Parliament—pardon me—would disgrace any board of directors. Our rulers pretend to buy expert knowledge, but they never pay the price for it that a business man would pay, and if they get it they have not the courage to use it. Where is the inducement for a man of genius to sell his brains to our insipid governors?"

"And yet knowledge is the only power—now as ever. A little mechanical device will wreck your navies. A new chemical combination will upset every rule of war. It is the same with our commerce. One or two minute changes might sink Britain to the level of Ecuador, or give China the key of the world's wealth. And yet we never dream that these things are possible. We think our castles of sand are the ramparts of the universe."

I have never had the gift of the gab, but I admire it in others. There is a morbid charm in such talk, a kind of exhilaration, of which one is half ashamed. I found myself interested, and more than a little impressed.

"But surely," I said, "the first thing a discoverer does is to make his discovery public. He wants the honour and glory, and he wants money for it. It becomes part of the world's knowledge, and everything is readjusted to meet it. That was what happened with electricity. You call our civilisation a machine, but it is something far more flexible. It has the power of adaptation of a living organism."

"That might be true if the new knowledge really became the world's property. But does it? I read now and then in the papers that some eminent scientist has made a great discovery. He reads a paper before some Academy of Science, and there are leading articles on it, and his photograph adorns the magazines. That kind of man is not the danger. He is a bit of the machine, a party to the compact. It is the men who stand outside it that are to be reckoned with, the artists in discovery who will never use their knowledge till they can use it with full effect. Believe me, the biggest brains are without the ring which we call civilisation."

Then his voice seemed to hesitate. "You may hear people say that submarines have done away with the battleship, and that aircraft have annulled the mastery of the sea. That is what our pessimists say. But do you imagine that the clumsy submarine or the fragile aeroplane is really the last word of science?"

"No doubt they will develop," I said, "but by that time the power of the defence will have advanced also."

He shook his head. "It is not so. Even now

the knowledge which makes possible great engines of destruction is far beyond the capacity of any defence. You see only the productions of second-rate folk who are in a hurry to get wealth and fame. The true knowledge, the deadly knowledge, is still kept secret. But, believe me, my friend, it is there."

He paused for a second, and I saw the faint outline of the smoke from his cigar against the background of the dark. Then he quoted me one or two cases, slowly, as if in some doubt about the wisdom of his words.

It was these cases that startled me. They were of different kinds—a great calamity, a sudden breach between two nations, a blight on a vital crop, a war, a pestilence. I will not repeat them. I do not think I believed in them then, and now I believe less. But they were horribly impressive, as told in that quiet voice in that sombre room on that dark June night. If he was right, these things had not been the work of Nature or accident, but of a devilish art. The nameless brains that he spoke of, working silently in the background, now and then showed their power by some cataclysmic revelation. I did not believe him, but, as he put the case, showing with strange clearness the steps in the game, I had no words to protest.

At last I found my voice.

"What you describe is super-anarchy, and yet it makes no headway. What is the motive of those diabolical brains?"

He laughed. "How should I be able to tell you? I am a humble inquirer, and in my researches I come on curious bits of fact. But I

cannot pry into motives. I only know of the existence of great extra-social intelligences. Let us say that they distrust the machine. They may be idealists and desire to make a new world, or they may simply be artists, loving for its own sake the pursuit of truth. If I were to hazard a guess, I should say that it took both types to bring about results, for the second find the knowledge and the first the will to use it."

A recollection came back to me. It was of a hot upland meadow in Tyrol, where among acres of flowers and beside a leaping stream I was breakfasting after a morning spent in climbing the white crags. I had picked up a German on the way, a small man of the Professor class, who did me the honour to share my sandwiches. He conversed fluently but quaintly in English, and he was, I remember, a Nietzschean and a hot rebel against the established order. "The pity," he cried, "is that the reformers do not know, and those who know are too idle to reform. Some day there will come the marriage of knowledge and will, and then the world will march."

"You draw an awful picture," I said. "But if those extra-social brains are so potent, why after all do they effect so little? A dull police-officer, with the machine behind him, can afford to laugh at most experiments in anarchy."

"True," he said, "and civilisation will win until its enemies learn from it the importance of the machine. The compact must endure until there is a counter-compact. Consider the ways of that form of foolishness which to-day we call nihilism or anarchy. A few illiterate bandits in a Paris

slum defy the world, and in a week they are in jail. Half a dozen crazy Russian *intellectuels* in Geneva conspire to upset the Romanovs, and are hunted down by the police of Europe. All the Governments and their not very intelligent police forces join hands, and hey, presto! there is an end of the conspirators. For civilisation knows how to use such powers as it has, while the immense potentiality of the unlicensed is dissipated in vapour. Civilisation wins because it is a world-wide league; its enemies fail because they are parochial. But supposing——”

Again he stopped and rose from his chair. He found a switch and flooded the room with light. I glanced up blinking to see my host smiling down on me, a most benevolent and courteous old gentleman. He had resumed his tinted glasses.

“Forgive me,” he said, “for leaving you in darkness while I bored you with my gloomy prognostications. A recluse is apt to forget what is due to a guest.”

He handed the cigar-box to me, and pointed to a table where whisky and mineral waters had been set out.

“I want to hear the end of your prophecies,” I said. “You were saying——?”

“I said—supposing anarchy learned from civilisation and became international. Oh, I don’t mean the bands of advertising donkeys who call themselves International Unions of Workers and such-like rubbish. I mean if the real brain-stuff of the world were internationalised. Suppose that the links in the cordon of civilisation were neutralised

by other links in a far more potent chain. The earth is seething with incoherent power and unorganised intelligence. Have you ever reflected on the case of China? There you have millions of quick brains stifled in trumpery crafts. They have no direction, no driving power, so the sum of their efforts is futile, and the world laughs at China. Europe throws her a million or two on loan now and then, and she cynically responds by begging the prayers of Christendom. And yet, I say, supposing——”

“It’s a horrible idea,” I said, “and, thank God, I don’t believe it possible. Mere destruction is too barren a creed to inspire a new Napoleon, and you can do with nothing short of one.”

“It would scarcely be destruction,” he replied gently. “Let us call it iconoclasm, the swallowing of formulas, which has always had its full retinue of idealists. And you do not want a Napoleon. All that is needed is direction, which could be given by men of far lower gifts than a Bonaparte. In a word, you want a Power-House, and then the age of miracles will begin.”

I got up, for the hour was late, and I had had enough of this viewy talk. My host was smiling, and I think that smile was the thing I really disliked about him. It was too—what shall I say?—superior and Olympian.

As he led me into the hall he apologised for indulging his whims. “But you, as a lawyer, should welcome the idea. If there is an atom of truth in my fancies, your task is far bigger than you thought. You are not defending an easy case, but fighting in a contest where the issues are still

doubtful. That should encourage your professional pride. . . .”

By all the rules I should have been sleepy, for it was past midnight, and I had had a long day in the open air. But that wretched talk had unsettled me, and I could not get my mind off it. I have reproduced very crudely the substance of my host's conversation, but no words of mine could do justice to his eerie persuasiveness. There was a kind of magnetism in the man, a sense of vast powers and banked-up fires, which would have given weight to the tritest platitudes. I had a horrible feeling that he was trying to convince me, to fascinate me, to prepare the ground for some proposal. Again and again I told myself it was crazy nonsense, the heated dream of a visionary, but again and again I came back to some detail which had a horrid air of reality. If the man was a romancer he had an uncommon gift of realism.

I flung open my bedroom window and let in the soft air of the June night and the scents from leagues of clover and pines and sweet grasses. It momentarily refreshed me, for I could not believe that this homely and gracious world held such dire portents.

But always that phrase of his, the “Power-House,” kept recurring. You know how twisted your thoughts get during a wakeful night, and long before I fell asleep towards morning I had worked myself up into a very complete dislike of that bland and smiling gentleman, my host. Suddenly it occurred to me that I did not know his name, and that set me off on another train of reflection.

I did not wait to be called, but rose about seven, dressed, and went downstairs. I heard the sound of a car on the gravel of the drive, and to my delight saw that Stagg had arrived. I wanted to get away from the house as soon as possible, and I had no desire to meet its master again in this world.

The grim housekeeper, who answered my summons, received my explanation in silence. Breakfast would be ready in twenty minutes; eight was Mr. Lumley's hour for it.

"Mr. Andrew Lumley?" I asked with a start.

"Mr. Andrew Lumley," she said.

So that was my host's name. I sat down at a bureau in the hall and did a wildly foolish thing.

I wrote a letter, beginning "Dear Mr. Lumley," thanking him for his kindness and explaining the reason of my early departure. It was imperative, I said, that I should be in London by midday. Then I added: "I wish I had known who you were last night, for I think you know an old friend of mine, Charles Pitt-Heron."

Breakfastless I joined Stagg in the car, and soon we were swinging down from the uplands to the shallow vale of the Wey. My thoughts were very little on my new toy or on the midsummer beauties of Surrey. The friend of Pitt-Heron, who knew about his going to Bokhara, was the maniac who dreamed of the "Power-House." There were going to be dark scenes in the drama before it was played out.

V : I FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF THE SUPER-BUTLER

MY first thought, as I journeyed towards London, was that I was horribly alone in this business.

Whatever was to be done I must do it myself, for the truth was I had no evidence which any authority would recognise. Pitt-Heron was the friend of a strange being who collected objects of art, probably passed under an *alias* in South London, and had absurd visions of the end of civilisation. That, in cold black and white, was all my story came to. If I went to the police they would laugh at me, and they would be right.

Now I am a sober and practical person, but, slender though my evidence was, it brought to my mind the most absolute conviction. I seemed to know Pitt-Heron's story as if I had heard it from his own lips—his first meeting with Lumley and their growing friendship ; his initiation into secret and forbidden things ; the revolt of the decent man, appalled that his freakishness had led him so far ; the realisation that he could not break so easily with his past, and that Lumley held him in his power ; and last, the mad flight under the pressure of overwhelming terror.

I could read, too, the purpose of that flight. He knew the Indian frontier as few men know it, and in the wild tangle of the Pamirs he hoped to baffle his enemy. Then from some far refuge he would send for his wife, and spend the rest of his days in exile. It must have been an omnipotent terror to drive such a man, young, brilliant, rich, successful, to the fate of an absconding felon.

But Lumley was on his trail. So I read the telegram I had picked up on the floor of the Blackheath house, and my business was to frustrate the pursuit. Some one must have gone to Bokhara, some creature of Lumley's, perhaps the super-butler I had met in the County Court. The telegram, for I had noted the date, had been received on the 27th day of May. It was now the 15th of June, so if some one had started immediately on its receipt, in all probability he would by now be in Bokhara.

I must find out who had gone, and endeavour to warn Tommy. I calculated that it would have taken him seven or eight days to get from Moscow by the Transcaspian; probably he would find Pitt-Heron gone, but inquiries would set him on the track. I might be able to get in touch with him through the Russian officials. In any case, if Lumley were stalking Pitt-Heron, I, unknown and unsuspected, would be stalking Lumley.

And then in a flash I realised my folly.

The wretched letter I had written that morning had given the whole show away. Lumley knew that I was a friend of Pitt-Heron, and that I knew that he was a friend of Pitt-Heron. If my guess was right, friendship with Lumley was not a thing Charles was likely to confess to, and he would argue that my knowledge of it meant that I was in Charles's confidence. I would therefore know of his disappearance and its cause, and alone in London would connect it with the decorous bachelor of the Albany. My letter was a warning to him that he could not play the game unobserved, and I, too, would be suspect in his eyes.

Jawa hir. Lal Bhat

It was no good crying over spilt milk, and Lumley's suspicions must be accepted. But I confess that the thought gave me the shivers. The man had a curious terror for me, a terror I cannot hope to analyse and reproduce for you. My bald words can give no idea of the magnetic force of his talk, the sense of brooding and unholy craft. I was proposing to match my wits against a master's—one, too, who must have at his command an organisation far beyond my puny efforts. I have said that my first feeling was that of loneliness and isolation; my second was one of hopeless insignificance. It was a boy's mechanical toy arrayed against a Power-House with its shining wheels and monstrous dynamos.

My first business was to get into touch with Tommy.

At that time I had a friend in one of the Embassies, whose acquaintance I had made on a dry-fly stream in Hampshire. I will not tell you his name, for he has since become a great figure in the world's diplomacy, and I am by no means certain that the part he played in this tale was strictly in accordance with official etiquette. I had assisted him on the legal side in some of the international worries that beset all Embassies, and we had reached the point of intimacy which is marked by the use of Christian names and by dining frequently together. Let us call him Monsieur Felix. He was a grave young man, slightly my senior, learned, discreet, and ambitious, but with an engaging boyishness cropping up now and then under the official gold lace. It occurred to me that in him I might find an ally.

I reached London about eleven in the morning, and went straight to Belgrave Square. Felix I found in the little library off the big secretaries' room, a sunburnt sportsman fresh from a Norwegian salmon-river. I asked him if he had half an hour to spare, and was told that the day was at my service.

"You know Tommy Deloraine?" I asked.

He nodded.

"And Charles Pitt-Heron?"

"I have heard of him."

"Well, here is my trouble. I have reason to believe that Tommy has joined Pitt-Heron in Bokhara. If he has, my mind will be greatly relieved, for, though I can't tell you the story, I can tell you that Pitt-Heron is in very considerable danger. Can you help me?"

Felix reflected. "That should be simple enough. I can wire in cypher to the Military Governor. The police there are pretty efficient, as you may imagine, and travellers don't come and go without being remarked. I should be able to give you an answer within twenty-four hours. But I must describe Tommy. How does one do that in telegraphese?"

"I want you to tell me another thing," I said. "You remember that Pitt-Heron has some reputation as a Central Asian traveller. Tommy, as you know, is as mad as a hatter. Suppose these two fellows at Bokhara, wanting to make a long trek into wild country—how would they go? You've been there, and know the lie of the land."

Felix got down a big German atlas, and for half an hour we pored over it. From Bokhara, he said,

the only routes for madmen ran to the south. East and north you got into Siberia ; west lay the Transcaspian desert ; but southward you might go through the Hissar range by Pamirski Post to Gilgit and Kashmir, or you might follow up the Oxus and enter the north of Afghanistan, or you might go by Merv into north-eastern Persia. The first he thought the likeliest route, if a man wanted to travel fast.

I asked him to put in his cable a suggestion about watching the Indian roads, and left him with a promise of early enlightenment.

Then I went down to the Temple, fixed some consultations, and spent a quiet evening in my rooms. I had a heavy sense of impending disaster, not unnatural in the circumstances. I really cannot think what it was that held me to the job, for I don't mind admitting that I felt pretty queasy about it. Partly, no doubt, liking for Tommy and Ethel, partly regret for that unfortunate fellow Pitt-Heron, most of all, I think, dislike of Lumley. That bland superman had fairly stirred my prosaic antipathies.

That night I went carefully over every item in the evidence to try and decide on my next step. I had got to find out more about my enemies. Lumley, I was pretty certain, would baffle me, but I thought I might have a better chance with the super-butler. As it turned out, I hit his trail almost at once.

Next day I was in a case at the Old Bailey. It was an important prosecution for fraud, and I appeared, with two leaders, for the bank concerned.

The amazing and almost incredible thing about this story of mine is the way clues kept rolling in unsolicited, and I was to get another from this dull prosecution. I suppose that the explanation is that the world is full of clues to everything, and that, if a man's mind is sharp-set on any quest, he happens to notice and take advantage of what otherwise he would miss. My leaders were both absent the first day, and I had to examine our witnesses alone.

Towards the close of the afternoon I put a fellow in the box, an oldish, drink-sodden clerk from a Cannon Street bucket-shop. His evidence was valuable for our case, but I was very doubtful how he would stand a cross-examination as to credit. His name was Routh, and he spoke with a strong North-country accent. But what caught my attention was his face. His jaw looked as if it had been made in two pieces which did not fit, and he had little, bright, protuberant eyes. At my first glance I was conscious of a recollection.

He was still in the box when the Court rose, and I informed the solicitors that before going further I wanted a conference with the witness. I mentioned also that I should like to see him alone. A few minutes later he was brought to my chambers, and I put one or two obvious questions on the case, till the managing clerk who accompanied him announced with many excuses that he must hurry away. Then I shut the door, gave Mr. Routh a cigar, and proceeded to conduct a private inquiry.

He was a pathetic being, only too ready to talk. I learned the squalid details of his continuous misfortunes. He had been the son of a dissenting

minister in Northumberland, and had drifted through half a dozen occupations till he found his present unsavoury billet. Truth was written large on his statement ; he had nothing to conceal, for his foible was folly, not crime, and he had not a rag of pride to give him reticence. He boasted that he was a gentleman and well-educated, too, but he had never had a chance. His brother had advised him badly ; his brother was too clever for a prosaic world ; always through his reminiscences came this echo of fraternal admiration and complaint.

It was about the brother I wanted to know, and Mr. Routh was very willing to speak. Indeed, it was hard to disentangle facts from his copious outpourings. The brother had been an engineer and a highly successful one ; had dallied with politics, too, and had been a great inventor. He had put Mr. Routh on to a South American speculation, where he had made a little money, but speedily lost it again. Oh, he had been a good brother in his way, and had often helped him, but he was a busy man, and his help never went quite far enough. Besides, he did not like to apply to him too often. I gathered that the brother was not a person to take liberties with.

I asked him what he was doing now.

" Ah," said Mr. Routh, " that is what I wish I could tell you. I will not conceal from you that for the moment I am in considerable financial straits, and this case, though my hands are clean enough, God knows, will not make life easier for me. My brother is a mysterious man, whose business often takes him abroad. I have never known even his address, for I write always to a London office

from which my communications are forwarded. I only know that he is in some big electrical business, for I remember that he once let drop the remark that he was in charge of some power-station. No, I do not think it is in London ; probably somewhere abroad. I heard from him a fortnight ago, and he told me he was just leaving England for a couple of months. It is very annoying, for I want badly to get into touch with him."

"Do you know, Mr. Routh," I said, "I believe I have met your brother. Is he like you in any way?"

"We have a strong family resemblance, but he is taller and slimmer. He has been more prosperous, and has lived a healthier life, you see."

"Do you happen to know," I asked, "if he ever uses another name? I don't think that the man I knew was called Routh."

The clerk flushed. "I think it highly unlikely that my brother would use an *alias*. He has done nothing to disgrace a name of which we are proud."

I told him that my memory had played me false, and we parted on very good terms. He was an innocent soul, one of those people that clever rascals get to do their dirty work for them. But there was no mistaking the resemblance. There, without the brains and force and virility, went my super-butler of Blackheath, who passed under the name of Tuke.

The clerk had given me the name of the office at whose address he had written to his brother. I was not surprised to find that it was that of the firm of stockbrokers for whom I was still acting

in the bearer-bonds case where I had heard Pavia's name.

I rang up the partner whom I knew, and told him a very plausible story of having a message for one of Mr. Pavia's servants, and asked him if he were in touch with them and could forward letters. He made me hold the line, and then came back and told me that he had forwarded letters for Tuke, the butler, and one Routh who was a groom or footman. Tuke had gone abroad to join his master and he did not know his address. But he advised me to write to the White Lodge.

I thanked him and rang off. That was settled, anyhow. Tuke's real name was Routh, and it was Tuke who had gone to Bokhara.

My next step was to ring up Macgillivray at Scotland Yard and get an appointment in half an hour's time. Macgillivray had been at the Bar—I had read in his chambers—and was now one of the heads of the Criminal Investigation Department. I was about to ask him for information which he was in no way bound to give me, but I presumed on our old acquaintance.

I asked him first whether he had ever heard of a secret organisation which went under the name of the Power-House. He laughed out loud at my question.

"I should think we have several hundreds of such pet names on our records," he said. "Everything from the Lodge of the Baldfaced Ravens to Solomon's Seal No. X. Fancy nomenclature is the relaxation of the tired anarchist, and matters very little. The dangerous fellows have no names, no numbers even, which we can get hold of. But I'll

get a man to look up our records. There may be something filed about your Power-House."

My second question he answered differently. "Routh! Routh! Why, yes, there was a Routh we had dealings with a dozen years ago when I used to do the North-Eastern circuit. He was a trade-union official who bagged the funds, and they couldn't bring him to justice because of the ridiculous extra-legal status they possess. He knew it, and played their own privileges against them. Oh yes, he was a very complete rogue. I once saw him at a meeting in Sunderland, and I remember his face—sneering eyes, diabolically clever mouth, and with it all as smug as a family butler. He has disappeared from England—at least we haven't heard of him for some years, but I can show you his photograph."

Macgillivray took from a lettered cabinet a bundle of cards, selected one, and tossed it towards me. It was that of a man of thirty or so, with short side-whiskers and a drooping moustache. The eyes, the ill-fitting jaw, and the brow were those of my friend Mr. Tuke, brother and patron of the sorrowful Mr. Routh, who had already that afternoon occupied my attention.

Macgillivray promised to make certain inquiries, and I walked home in a state of elation. Now I knew for certain who had gone to Bokhara, and I knew something, too, of the traveller's past. A discredited genius was the very man for Lumley's schemes—one who asked for nothing better than to use his brains outside the ring-fence of convention. Somewhere in the wastes of Turkestan the ex-trade-union official was in search of Pitt-Heron.

I did not fancy that Mr. Tuke would be very squeamish.

I dined at the club and left early. Going home, I had an impression that I was being shadowed.

You know the feeling that some one is watching you, a sort of sensation which the mind receives without actual evidence. If the watcher is behind, where you can't see him, you have a cold feeling between your shoulders. I daresay it is a legacy from the days when the cave-man had to look pretty sharp to keep from getting his enemy's knife between the ribs.

It was a bright summer evening, and Piccadilly had its usual crowd of motor-cars and buses and foot passengers. I halted twice, once in St. James's Street and once at the corner of Stratton Street, and retraced my steps for a bit ; and each time I had the impression that some one a hundred yards or so off had done the same. My instinct was to turn round and face him, whoever he was, but I saw that that was foolishness. Obviously in such a crowd I could get no certainty in the matter, so I put it out of my mind.

I spent the rest of the evening in my rooms, reading cases and trying to keep my thoughts off Central Asia. About ten I was rung up on the telephone by Felix. He had had his answer from Bokhara. Pitt-Heron had left with a small caravan on June 2nd by the main road through the Hissar range. Tommy had arrived on June 10th, and on the 12th had set off with two servants on the same trail. Travelling the lighter of the two, he

should have overtaken Pitt-Heron by the 15th at latest.

That was yesterday, and my mind was immensely relieved. Tommy in such a situation was a tower of strength, for, whatever his failings in politics, I knew no one I would rather have with me to go tiger-shooting.

Next day the sense of espionage increased. I was in the habit of walking down to the Temple by way of Pall Mall and the Embankment, but, as I did not happen to be in Court that morning, I resolved to make a detour and test my suspicions. There seemed to be nobody in Down Street as I emerged from my flat, but I had not walked five yards before, turning back, I saw a man enter from the Piccadilly end, while another moved across the Hertford Street opening. It may have been only my imagination, but I was convinced that these were my watchers.

I walked up Park Lane, for it seemed to me that by taking the Tube at the Marble Arch Station I could bring matters to the proof. I have a knack of observing small irrelevant details, and I happened to have noticed that a certain carriage in the train which left Marble Arch about 9.30 stopped exactly opposite the exit at the Chancery Lane Station, and by hurrying up the passage one could just catch the lift which served an earlier train, and so reach the street before any of the other travellers.

I performed this manœuvre with success, caught the early lift, reached the street, and took cover behind a pillar-box, from which I could watch the exit of passengers from the stairs. I judged that

my tracker, if he missed me below, would run up the stairs rather than wait for the lift. Sure enough, a breathless gentleman appeared, who scanned the street eagerly, and then turned to the lift to watch the emerging passengers. It was clear that the espionage was no figment of my brain.

I walked slowly to my chambers, and got through the day's work as best I could, for my mind was preoccupied with the unpleasant business in which I found myself entangled. I would have given a year's income to be honestly quit of it, but there seemed to be no way of escape. The maddening thing was that I could do so little. There was no chance of forgetting anxiety in strenuous work. I could only wait with the patience at my command, and hope for the one chance in a thousand which I might seize. I felt miserably that it was no game for me. I had never been brought up to harry wild beasts and risk my neck twice a day at polo like Tommy Deloraine. I was a peaceful sedentary man, a lover of a quiet life, with no appetite for perils and commotions. But I was beginning to realise that I was very obstinate.

At four o'clock I left the Temple and walked to the Embassy. I had resolved to banish the espionage from my mind, for that was the least of my difficulties.

Felix gave me an hour of his valuable time. It was something that Tommy had joined Pitt-Heron, but there were other matters to be arranged in that far country. The time had come, in my opinion, to tell him the whole story.

The telling was a huge relief to my mind. He

did not laugh at me as I had half feared, but took the whole thing as gravely as possible. In his profession, I fancy, he had found too many certainties behind suspicions to treat anything as trivial. The next step, he said, was to warn the Russian police of the presence of the man called Saronov and the super-butler. Happily we had materials for the description of Tuke or Routh, and I could not believe that such a figure would be hard to trace. Felix cabled again in cypher, asking that the two should be watched, more especially if there was reason to believe that they had followed Tommy's route. Once more we got out the big map and discussed the possible ways. It seemed to me a land created by Providence for surprises, for the roads followed the valleys, and to the man who travelled light there must be many short cuts through the hills.

I left the Embassy before six o'clock and, crossing the Square engrossed with my own thoughts, ran full into Lumley.

I hope I played my part well, though I could not repress a start of surprise. He wore a grey morning-coat and a white top-hat, and looked the image of benevolent respectability.

"Ah, Mr. Leithen," he said, "we meet again."

I murmured something about my regrets at my early departure three days ago, and added the feeble joke that I wished he would hurry on his *Twilight of Civilisation*, for the burden of it was becoming too much for me.

He looked me in the eyes with all the friendliness in the world. "So you have not forgotten our evening's talk? You owe me something, my

friend, for giving you a new interest in your profession."

"I owe you much," I said, "for your hospitality, your advice, and your warnings."

He was wearing his tinted glasses, and peered quizzically into my face.

"I am going to make a call in Grosvenor Place," he said, "and shall beg in return the pleasure of your company. So you know my young friend, Pitt-Heron?"

With an ingenuous countenance I explained that he had been at Oxford with me and that we had common friends.

"A brilliant young man," said Lumley. "Like you, he has occasionally cheered an old man's solitude. And he has spoken of me to you?"

"Yes," I said, lying stoutly. "He used to tell me about your collections." (If Lumley knew Charles well he would find me out, for the latter would not have crossed the road for all treasures of the Louvre.)

"Ah, yes, I have picked up a few things. If ever you should care to see them I should be honoured. You are a connoisseur? Of a sort? You interest me, for I should have thought your taste lay in other directions than the dead things of art. Pitt-Heron is no collector. He loves life better than art, as a young man should. A great traveller, our friend—the Laurence Oliphant or Richard Burton of our day."

We stopped at a house in Grosvenor Place, and he relinquished my arm. "Mr. Leithen," he said, "a word from one who wishes you no ill. You are a friend of Pitt-Heron, but where he goes you

cannot follow. Take my advice and keep out of his affairs. You will do no good to him, and you may bring yourself into serious danger. You are a man of sense, a practical man, so I speak to you frankly. But, remember, I do not warn twice."

He took off his glasses, and his light, wild eyes looked me straight in the face. All benevolence had gone, and something implacable and deadly burned in them. Before I could say a word in reply he shuffled up the steps of the house and was gone. . . .

VI: I TAKE A PARTNER

THAT meeting with Lumley scared me badly, but it also clinched my resolution. The most pacific fellow on earth can be gingered into pugnacity. I had now more than my friendship for Tommy and my sympathy with Pitt-Heron to urge me on. A man had tried to bully me, and that roused all the worst stubbornness of my soul. I was determined to see the game through at any cost.

But I must have an ally if my nerves were to hold out, and my mind turned at once to Tommy's friend, Chapman. I thought with comfort of the bluff independence of the Labour member. So that night at the House I hunted him out in the smoking-room.

He had been having a row with the young bloods of my party that afternoon and received me ungraciously.

"I'm about sick of you fellows," he growled. (I shall not attempt to reproduce Chapman's

accent. He spoke rich Yorkshire, with a touch of the drawl of the western dales.) "They went and spoiled the best speech, though I say it as shouldn't, which this old place has heard for a twelvemonth. I've been workin' for days at it in the Library. I was tellin' them how much more bread cost under Protection, and the Jew Hilderstein started a laugh because I said kilometres for kilogrammes. It was just a slip o' the tongue, for I had it right in my notes, and besides, these furrin words don't matter a curse. Then that young lord as sits for East Claygate gets up and goes out as I was gettin' into my peroration, and he drops his topper and knocks off old Higgins's spectacles, and all the idiots laughed. After that I gave it them hot and strong, and got called to order. And then Wattles, him as used to be as good a Socialist as me, replied for the Government and his blamed Board, and said that the Board thought this and the Board thought that, and was blessed if the Board would stir its stumps. Well I mind the day when I was hanging on to the Board's coat-tails in Hyde Park to keep it from talking treason."

It took me a long time to get Chapman settled down and anchored to a drink.

"I want you," I said, "to tell me about Routh—you know the fellow I mean—the ex-Union-Leader."

At that he fairly blazed up.

"There you are, you Tories," he shouted, causing a pale Liberal member on the next sofa to make a hurried exit. "You can't fight fair. You hate the Unions, and you rake up any rotten old prejudice to discredit them. You can find out

about Routh for yourself, for I'm damned if I help you."

I saw I could do nothing with Chapman unless I made a clean breast of it, so for the second time that day I told the whole story.

I couldn't have wished for a better audience. He got wildly excited before I was half through with it. No doubt of the correctness of my evidence ever entered his head, for, like most of his party, he hated anarchism worse than capitalism, and the notion of a highly capitalised, highly scientific, highly-undemocratic anarchism fairly revolted his soul. Besides, he adored Tommy Deloraine.

Routh, he told me, had been a young engineer of a superior type, with a job in a big shop at Sheffield. He had professed advanced political views, and, although he had strictly no business to be there, had taken a large part in Trade Union work, and was treasurer of one big branch. Chapman had met him often at conferences and on platforms, and had been impressed by the fertility and ingenuity of his mind and the boldness of his purpose. He was the leader of the left wing of the movement, and had that gift of half-scientific, half-philosophic jargon which is dear at all times to the hearts of the half-baked. A seat in Parliament had been repeatedly offered him, but he had always declined; wisely, Chapman thought, for he judged him the type which is more effective behind the scenes.

But with all his ability he had not been popular. "He was a cold-blooded, sneering devil," as Chapman put it, "a sort of Parnell. He tyrannised

over his followers, and he was the rudest brute I ever met."

Then followed the catastrophe, in which it became apparent that he had speculated with the funds of the Union and had lost a large sum. Chapman, however, was suspicious of these losses, and was inclined to believe that he had the money all the time in a safe place. A year or two earlier the Unions, greatly to the disgust of old-fashioned folk, had been given certain extra-legal privileges, and this man Routh had been one of the chief advocates of the Unions' claims. Now he had the cool effrontery to turn the tables on them, and use those very privileges to justify his action and escape prosecution.

There was nothing to be done. Some of the fellows, said Chapman, swore to wring his neck, but he did not give them the chance. He had disappeared from England, and was generally believed to be living in some foreign capital.

"What I would give to be even with the swine!" cried my friend, clenching and unclenching his big fist. "But we're up against no small thing in Josiah Routh. There isn't a crime on earth he'd stick at, and he's as clever as the old Devil, his master."

"If that's how you feel, I can trust you to back me up," I said. "And the first thing I want you to do is to come and stay at my flat. God knows what may happen next, and two men are better than one. I tell you frankly, I'm nervous, and I would like to have you with me."

Chapman had no objection. I accompanied him to his Bloomsbury lodgings, where he packed a

bag, and we returned to the Down Street flat. The sight of his burly figure and sagacious face was a relief to me in the mysterious darkness where I now found myself walking.

Thus began my housekeeping with Chapman, one of the queerest episodes in my life. He was the best fellow in the world, but I found that I had misjudged his character. To see him in the House you would have thought him a piece of granite, with his Yorkshire bluntness and hard, downright, north-country sense. He had all that somewhere inside him, but he was also as romantic as a boy. The new situation delighted him. He was quite clear that it was another case of the strife between Capital and Labour—Tommy and I standing for Labour, though he used to refer to Tommy in public as a "gilded popinjay," and only a month before had described me in the House as a "viperous lackey of Capitalism." It was the best kind of strife in which you had not to meet your adversary with long-winded speeches, but might any moment get a chance to pummel him with your fists.

He made me ache with laughter. The spying business used to rouse him to fury. I don't think he was tracked as I was, but he chose to fancy he was, and was guilty of assault and battery on one butcher's boy, two cabbies, and a gentleman who turned out to be a bookmaker's assistant. This side of him got to be an infernal nuisance, and I had many rows with him. Among other things, he chose to suspect my man Waters of treachery—Waters, who was the son of a gardener at home,

and hadn't wits enough to put up an umbrella when it rained.

"You're not taking this business rightly," he maintained one night. "What's the good of waiting for these devils to down you? Let's go out and down them." And he announced his intention, from which no words of mine could dissuade him, of keeping watch on Mr. Andrew Lumley at the Albany.

His resolution led to a complete disregard of his Parliamentary duties. Deputations of constituents waited for him in vain. Of course he never got a sight of Lumley. All that happened was that he was very nearly given in charge more than once for molesting peaceable citizens in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly and Regent Street.

One night, on my way home from the Temple, I saw in the bills of the evening papers the announcement of the arrest of a Labour Member. It was Chapman, sure enough. At first I feared that he had got himself into serious trouble, and was much relieved to find him in the flat in a state of blazing anger. It seemed that he had found somebody whom he thought was Lumley, for he only knew him from my descriptions. The man was in a shop in Jermyn Street, with a car waiting outside, and Chapman had—politely, as he swore—asked the chauffeur his master's name. The chauffeur had replied abusively, upon which Chapman had haled him from the driver's seat and shaken him till his teeth rattled. The owner came out, and Chapman was arrested and taken off to the nearest police-court. He had been compelled to apologise, and had been fined five pounds and costs.

By the mercy of Heaven the chauffeur's master was a money-lender of evil repute, so the affair did Chapman no harm. But I was forced to talk to him seriously. I knew it was no use explaining that for him to spy on the Power-House was like an elephant stalking a gazelle. The only way was to appeal to his incurable romanticism.

"Don't you see," I told him, "that you are playing Lumley's game? He will trap you sooner or later into some escapade which will land you in jail, and where will I be then? That is what he and his friends are out for. We have got to meet cunning with cunning, and lie low till we get our chance."

He allowed himself to be convinced, and handed over to me the pistol he had bought, which had been the terror of my life.

"All right," he said, "I'll keep quiet. But you promise to let me into the big scrap when it comes off."

I promised. Chapman's notion of the grand finale was a Homeric combat in which he would get his fill of fisticuffs.

He was an anxiety, but all the same he was an enormous comfort. His imperturbable cheerfulness and his racy talk were the tonics I wanted. He had plenty of wisdom, too. My nerves were getting bad those days, and, whereas I had rarely touched the things before, I now found myself smoking cigarettes from morning till night. I am pretty abstemious, as you know, but I discovered to my horror that I was drinking far too many whiskies-and-sodas. Chapman knocked me off all that, and got me back to a pipe and a modest nightcap.

He did more, for he undertook to put me in training. His notion was that we should win in the end by superior muscles. He was a square, thick-set fellow, who had been a good middleweight boxer. I could box a bit myself, but I improved mightily under his tuition. We got some gloves, and used to hammer each other for half an hour every morning. Then might have been seen the shameful spectacle of a rising barrister with a swollen lip and a black eye arguing in court and proceeding of an evening to his country's legislature, where he was confronted from the opposite benches by the sight of a Leader of the People in the same vulgar condition.

In those days I wanted all the relief I could get, for it was a beastly time. I knew I was in grave danger, so I made my will and went through the other doleful performances consequent on the expectation of a speedy decease. You see I had nothing to grip on, no clear job to tackle, only to wait on the offchance, with an atmosphere of suspicion thickening around me. The spying went on—there was no mistake about that—but I soon ceased to mind it, though I did my best to give my watchers little satisfaction. There was a hint of bullying about the spying. It is disconcerting at night to have a man bump against you and look you greedily in the face.

I did not go again to Scotland Yard, but one night I ran across Macgillivray in the club.

He had something of profound interest to tell me. I had asked about the phrase, the "Power-House." Well, he had come across it, in the letter of a German friend, a private letter, in which the

writer gave the results of his inquiries into a curious affair which a year before had excited Europe.

I have forgotten the details, but it had something to do with the Slav States of Austria and an Italian Students' Union, and it threatened at one time to be dangerous. Macgillivray's correspondent said that in some documents which were seized he found constant allusion to a thing called the *Krafthaus*, evidently the headquarters staff of the plot. And this same word *Krafthaus* had appeared elsewhere—in a sonnet of a poet-anarchist who shot himself in the slums of Antwerp, in the last ravings of more than one criminal, in the extraordinary testament of Professor M—— of Jena, who, at the age of thirty-seven, took his life after writing a strange mystical message to his fellow-citizens.

Macgillivray's correspondent concluded by saying that, in his opinion, if this *Krafthaus* could be found, the key would be discovered to the most dangerous secret organisation in the world. He added that he had some reason to believe that the motive power of the concern was English.

"Macgillivray," I said, "you have known me for some time, and I fancy you think me a sober and discreet person. Well, I believe I am on the edge of discovering the secret of your *Krafthaus*. I want you to promise me that if in the next week I send you an urgent message you will act on it, however fantastic it seems. I can't tell you more. I ask you to take me on trust, and believe that for anything I do I have tremendous reasons."

He knit his shaggy grey eyebrows and looked

curiously at me. "Yes, I'll go bail for your sanity. It's a good deal to promise, but if you make an appeal to me, I will see that it is met."

Next day I had news from Felix. Tuke and the man called Saronov had been identified. If you are making inquiries about anybody it is fairly easy to find those who are seeking for the same person, and the Russian police, in tracking Tommy and Pitt-Heron, had easily come on the two gentlemen who were following the same trail. The two had gone by Samarkand, evidently intending to strike into the hills by a shorter route than the main road from Bokhara. The frontier posts had been warned, and the stalkers had become the stalked.

That was one solid achievement, at any rate. I had saved Pitt-Heron from the worst danger, for first I had sent him Tommy, and now I had put the police on guard against his enemies. I had not the slightest doubt that enemies they were. Charles knew too much, and Tuke was the man appointed to reason with him, to bring him back, if possible, or if not—— As Chapman had said, the ex-Union leader was not the man to stick at trifles.

It was a broiling June, the London season was at its height, and I had never been so busy in the Courts before. But that crowded and garish world was little more than a dream to me. I went through my daily tasks, dined out, went to the play, had consultations, talked to my fellows, but all the while I had the feeling that I was watching somebody else perform the same functions. I believe I did my work well, and I know I was twice complimented by the Court of Appeal.

But my real interests were far away. Always I saw two men in the hot glens of the Oxus, with the fine dust of the *loess* rising in yellow clouds behind them. One of these men had a drawn and anxious face, and both rode hard. They passed by the closes of apricot and cherry and the green watered gardens, and soon the Oxus ceased to flow wide among rushes and water-lilies and became a turbid hill-stream. By-and-by the roadside changed, and the horses of the travellers trod on mountain turf, crushing the irises and marigolds and thyme. I could feel the free air blowing from the roof of the world, and see far ahead the snowy saddle of the pass which led to India.

Far behind the riders I saw two others, and they chose a different way, now over waterless plateaux, now in rugged *nullahs*. They rode the faster and their route was the shorter. Sooner or later they must catch up the first riders, and I knew, though how I could not tell, that death would attend the meeting.

I, and only I, sitting in London four thousand miles away, could prevent disaster. The dream haunted me at night, and often, walking in the Strand or sitting at a dinner-table, I have found my eyes fixed clearly on the shining upland with the thin white mountains at the back of it, and the four dots, which were men, hurrying fast on their business.

One night I met Lumley. It was at a big political dinner given by the chief of my party in the House of Lords—fifty or sixty guests, and a blaze of stars and decorations. I sat near the bottom of the table, and he was near the top,

sitting between a famous General and an ex-Viceroy of India. I asked my right-hand neighbour who he was, but he could not tell me. The same question to my left-hand neighbour brought an answer.

"It's old Lumley. Have you never met him? He doesn't go out much, but he gives a man's dinner now and then, which are the best in London. No. He's not a politician, though he favours our side, and I expect has given a lot to our funds. I can't think why they don't make him a Peer. He's enormously rich and very generous, and the most learned old fellow in Britain. My Chief"—my neighbour was an Under-Secretary—"knows him, and told me once that if you wanted any out-of-the-way bit of knowledge you could get it by asking Lumley. I expect he pulls the strings more than anybody living. But he scarcely ever goes out, and it's a feather in our host's cap to have got him to-night. You never see his name in the papers, either. He probably pays the Press to keep him out, like some of those millionaire fellows in America."

I watched him through dinner. He was the centre of the talk at his end of the table. I could see the blue ribbon bulging out on Lord Morecambe's breast as he leaned forward to question him. He was wearing some foreign orders, including the Legion of Honour, and I could hear in the pauses of conversation echoes of his soft rich voice. I could see him beaming through his glasses on his neighbours, and now and then he would take them off and look mildly at a speaker. I wondered why nobody realised, as I did, what was in his light wild eyes.

The dinner, I believe, was excellent, and the

company was good, but down at my end I could eat little, and I did not want to talk. Here in this pleasant room, with servants moving softly about, and a mellow light on the silver from the shaded candles, I felt the man was buttressed and defended beyond my reach. A kind of despairing hatred gripped me when I looked his way. For I was always conscious of that other picture—the Asian desert, Pitt-Heron's hunted face, and the grim figure of Tuke on his trail. That, and the great secret wheels of what was too inhuman to be called crime, moving throughout the globe under this man's hand.

There was a party afterwards, but I did not stay. No more did Lumley, and for a second I brushed against him in the hall at the foot of the big staircase.

He smiled on me affectionately.

"Have you been dining here? I did not notice you."

"You had better things to think of," I said. "By the way, you gave me good advice some weeks ago. It may interest you to hear that I have taken it."

"I am so glad," he said softly. "You are a very discreet young man."

But his eyes told me that he knew I lied.

VII: THE RESTAURANT IN ANTIOCH STREET

I WAS working late at the Temple next day, and it was nearly seven before I got up to go home. Macgillivray had telephoned to me in the afternoon saying he wanted to see me and

suggesting dinner at the club, and I had told him I should come straight there from my chambers. But just after six he had rung me up again and proposed another meeting-place.

"I've got some very important news for you and want to be quiet. There's a little place where I sometimes dine—Rapaccini's, in Antioch Street. I'll meet you there at half-past seven."

I agreed, and sent a message to Chapman at the flat, telling him I would be out to dinner. It was a Wednesday night, so the House rose early. He asked me where I was dining and I told him, but I did not mention with whom. His voice sounded very cross, for he hated a lonely meal.

It was a hot, still night, and I had had a heavy day in Court, so heavy that my private anxieties had almost slipped from my mind. I walked along the Embankment, and up Regent Street towards Oxford Circus. Antioch Street, as I had learned from the Directory, was in the area between Langham Place and Tottenham Court Road. I wondered vaguely why Macgillivray should have chosen such an out-of-the-way spot, but I knew him for a man of many whims.

The street, when I found it, turned out to be a respectable little place—boarding-houses and architects' offices, with a few antiquity shops, and a picture-cleaner's. The restaurant took some finding, for it was one of those discreet establishments, common enough in France, where no edibles are displayed in the British fashion, and muslin half-curtains deck the windows. Only the door-mat, lettered with the proprietor's name, remained to guide the hungry.

I gave a waiter my hat and stick and was ushered into a garish dining-room, apparently full of people. A single violinist was discoursing music from beside the grill. The occupants were not quite the kind one expects to find in an eating-house in a side street. The men were all in evening dress with white waistcoats, and the women looked either demi-mondaines or those who follow their taste in clothes. Various eyes looked curiously at me as I entered. I guessed that the restaurant had by one of those odd freaks of Londoners become for a moment the fashion.

The proprietor met me half-way up the room. He might call himself Rapaccini, but he was obviously a German.

"Mr. Geelvrai," he nodded. "He has engaged a private room. Will you follow, sir?"

A narrow stairway broke into the wall on the left side of the dining-room. I followed the manager up it and along a short corridor to a door which filled its end. He ushered me into a brightly-lit little room where a table was laid for two.

"Mr. Geelvrai comes often here," said the manager. "He will be late—sometimes. Everything is ready, sir. I hope you will be pleased."

It looked inviting enough, but the air smelt stuffy. Then I saw that, though the night was warm, the window was shut and the curtains drawn. I pulled back the curtains, and to my surprise saw that the shutters were closed.

"You must open these," I said, "or we'll stifle."

The manager glanced at the window. "I will send a waiter," he said, and departed. The door seemed to shut with an odd click.

I flung myself down in one of the arm-chairs, for I was feeling pretty tired. The little table beckoned alluringly, for I was also hungry. I remember there was a mass of pink roses on it. A bottle of champagne, with the cork loose, stood in a wine-cooler on the sideboard, and there was an unopened bottle beside it. It seemed to me that Macgillivray, when he dined here, did himself rather well.

The promised waiter did not arrive, and the stuffiness was making me very thirsty. I looked for a bell, but could not see one. My watch told me it was now a quarter to eight, but there was no sign of Macgillivray. I poured myself out a glass of champagne from the opened bottle, and was just about to drink it, when my eye caught something in a corner of the room.

It was one of those little mid-Victorian corner tables—I believe they call them “what-nots”—which you will find in any boarding-house littered up with photographs and coral and “Presents from Brighton.” On this one stood a photograph in a shabby frame, and I thought I recognised it.

I crossed the room and picked it up. It showed a man of thirty, with short side-whiskers, an ill-fitting jaw, and a drooping moustache. The duplicate of it was in Macgillivray’s cabinet. It was Mr. Routh, the ex-Union leader.

There was nothing very remarkable about that after all, but it gave me a nasty shock. The room now seemed a sinister place, as well as intolerably close. There was still no sign of the waiter to open the window, so I thought I would wait for Macgillivray downstairs.

But the door would not open. The handle would not turn. It did not seem to be locked, but rather to have shut with some kind of patent spring. I noticed that the whole thing was a powerful piece of oak with a heavy framework, very unlike the usual flimsy restaurant door.

My first instinct was to make a deuce of a row and attract the attention of the diners below. I own I was beginning to feel badly frightened. Clearly I had got into some sort of trap. Macgillivray's invitation might have been a hoax, for it is not difficult to counterfeit a man's voice on the telephone. With an effort I forced myself into calmness. It was preposterous to think that anything could happen to me in a room not thirty feet from where a score or two of ordinary citizens were dining. I had only to raise my voice to bring inquirers.

Yes, but above all things I did not want a row. It would never do for a rising lawyer and a Member of Parliament to be found shouting for help in an upper chamber of a Bloomsbury restaurant. The worst deductions would be drawn from the open bottle of champagne. Besides, it might be all right after all. The door might have got stuck. Macgillivray at that very moment might be on his way up.

So I sat down and waited. Then I remembered my thirst, and stretched out my hand to the glass of champagne.

But at that instant I looked towards the window, and set down the wine untasted.

It was a very odd window. The lower end was almost flush with the floor, and the hinges of the

shutters seemed to be only on one side. As I stared I began to wonder whether it was a window at all.

Next moment my doubts were solved. The window swung open like a door, and in the dark cavity stood a man.

Strangely enough I knew him. His figure was not one that is readily forgotten.

"Good evening, Mr. Docken," I said; "will you have a glass of champagne?"

A year before, on the South-Eastern circuit, I had appeared for the defence in a burglary case. Criminal law was not my province, but now and then I took a case to keep my hand in, for it is the best training in the world for the handling of witnesses. This case had been peculiar. A certain Bill Docken was the accused, a gentleman who bore a bad reputation in the eyes of the police. The evidence against him was strong, but it was more or less tainted, being chiefly that of two former accomplices—a proof that there is small truth in the proverbial honour among thieves. It was an ugly business, and my sympathies were with the accused, for though he may very well have been guilty, yet he had been the victim of a shabby trick. Anyhow I put my back into the case, and after a hard struggle got a verdict of "Not Guilty." Mr. Docken had been kind enough to express his appreciation of my efforts, and to ask in a hoarse whisper how I had "squared the old bird," meaning the Judge. He did not understand the subtleties of the English law of evidence.

He shambled into the room, a huge hulking figure of a man, with the thickness of chest which

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under happier circumstances might have made him a terror in the prize-ring. His features wore a heavy scowl which slowly cleared to a flicker of recognition.

"By God, it's the lawyer-chap," he muttered.

I pointed to the glass of champagne.

"I don't mind if I do," he said. "'Ere's 'ealth!"

He swallowed the wine at a gulp and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "'Ave a drop yourself, guv'nor," he added. "A glass of bubbly will cheer you up."

"Well, Mr. Docken," I said, "I hope I see you fit." I was getting wonderfully collected now that the suspense was over.

"Pretty fair, sir. Pretty fair. Able to do my day's work like an honest man."

"And what brings you here?"

"A little job I'm on. Some friends of mine wants you out of the road for a bit and they've sent me to fetch you. It's a bit of luck for you that you've struck a pal. We needn't 'ave no unpleasantness, seein' we're both what you might call men of the world."

"I appreciate the compliment," I said. "But where do you propose to take me?"

"Dunno. It's some lay near the Docks. I've got a motor-car waitin' at the back of the 'ouse."

"But supposing I don't want to go?"

"My orders admits no excuse," he said solemnly.

"You're a sensible chap, and can see that in a scrap I could down you easy."

"Very likely," I said. "But, man, you must be mad to talk like that. Downstairs there is a

dining-room full of people. I have only to lift my voice to bring the police."

"You're a kid," he said scornfully. "Them geysers downstairs are all in the job. That was a flat-catching rig to get you up here so as you wouldn't suspect nothing. If you was to go down now—which you ain't going to be allowed to do—you wouldn't find a blamed soul in the place. I must say you're a bit softer than I 'oped after the 'andsome way you talked over yon old juggins with the wig at Maidstone."

Mr. Docken took the bottle from the wine-cooler and filled himself another glass.

It sounded horribly convincing. If I was to be kidnapped and smuggled away, Lumley would have scored half a success. Not the whole; for, as I swiftly reflected, I had put Felix on the track of Tuke, and there was every chance that Tommy and Pitt-Heron would be saved. But for myself it looked pretty black. The more my scheme succeeded the more likely the Power-House would be to wreak its vengeance on me once I was spirited from the open-air world into its dark labyrinths.

I made a great effort to keep my voice even and calm.

"Mr. Docken," I said, "I once did you a good turn. But for me you might be doing time now instead of drinking champagne like a gentleman. Your pals played you a pretty low trick and that was why I stuck out for you. I didn't think you were the kind of man to forget a friend."

"No more I am," said he. "The man who says Bill Docken would go back on a pal is a liar."

"Well, here's your chance to pay your debts. The men who employ you are my deadly enemies and want to do me in. I'm not a match for you. You're a stronger fellow and can drag me off and hand me over to them. But if you do I'm done with. Make no mistake about that. I put it to you as a decent fellow. Are you going to go back on the man who has been a good friend to you?"

He shifted from one foot to another with his eyes on the ceiling. He was obviously in difficulties. Then he tried another glass of champagne.

"I dursn't, guv'nor. I dursn't let you go. Them I work for would cut my throat as soon as look at me. Besides, it ain't no good. If I was to go off and leave you there'd be plenty more in this 'ouse as would do the job. You're up against it, guv'nor. But take a sensible view and come with me. They don't mean you no real 'arm. I'll take my Bible oath on it. Only to keep you quiet for a bit, for you've run across one of their games. They won't do you no 'urt if you speak 'em fair. Be a sport and take it smiling-like——"

"You're afraid of them," I said.

"Yuss. I'm afraid. Black afraid. So would you be if you knew the gents. I'd rather take on the whole Rat Lane crowd—you know them as I mean—on a Saturday night when they're out for business than go back to my gents and say as 'ow I had shirked the job."

He shivered. "Good Lore, they'd freeze the 'eart out of a bull-pup."

"You're afraid," I said slowly. "So you're going to give me up to the men you're afraid of to do as they like with me. I never expected it of you,

Bill. I thought you were the kind of lad who would send any gang to the devil before you'd go back on a pal."

"Don't say that," he said almost plaintively. "You don't 'alf know the 'ole I'm in." His eye seemed to be wandering, and he yawned deeply.

Just then a great noise began below. I heard a voice speaking, a loud peremptory voice. Then my name was shouted: "Leithen! Leithen! Are you there?"

There could be no mistaking that stout Yorkshire tongue. By some miracle Chapman had followed me and was raising Cain downstairs.

My heart leaped with the sudden revulsion. "I'm here," I yelled. "Upstairs. Come up and let me out!"

Then I turned with a smile of triumph to Bill.

"My friends have come," I said. "You're too late for the job. Get back and tell your masters that."

He was swaying on his feet, and he suddenly lurched towards me. "You come along. By God, you think you've done me. I'll let you see."

His voice was growing thick and he stopped short. "What the 'ell's wrong with me?" he gasped. "I'm goin' all queer. I . . ."

He was like a man far gone in liquor, but three glasses of champagne would never have touched a head like Bill's. I saw what was wrong with him. He was not drunk, but drugged.

"They've doped the wine," I cried. "They put it there for me to drink it and go to sleep."

There is always something which is the last straw to any man. You may insult and outrage

him and he will bear it patiently, but touch the quick in his temper and he will turn. Apparently for Bill drugging was the unforgivable sin. His eye lost for a moment its confusion. He squared his shoulders and roared like a bull.

"Doped, by God!" he cried. "Who done it?"

"The men who shut me in this room. Burst that door and you will find them."

He turned a blazing face on the locked door and hurled his huge weight on it. It cracked and bent, but the lock and hinges held. I could see that sleep was overwhelming him and that his limbs were stiffening, but his anger was still strong enough for another effort. Again he drew himself together like a big cat and flung himself on the woodwork. The hinges tore from the jambs and the whole outfit fell forward into the passage in a cloud of splinters and dust and broken plaster.

It was Mr. Docken's final effort. He lay on the top of the wreckage he had made, like Samson among the ruins of Gaza, a senseless and slumbering hulk.

I picked up the unopened bottle of champagne—it was the only weapon available—and stepped over his body. I was beginning to enjoy myself amazingly.

As I expected, there was a man in the corridor, a little fellow in waiter's clothes with a tweed jacket instead of a dress-coat. If he had a pistol I knew I was done, but I gambled upon the disinclination of the management for the sound of shooting.

He had a knife, but he never had a chance to use

it. My champagne bottle descended on his head and he dropped like a log.

There were men coming upstairs—not Chapman, for I still heard his hoarse shouts in the dining-room. If they once got up they could force me back through that hideous room by the door through which Docken had come, and in five minutes I should be in their motor-car.

There was only one thing to do. I jumped from the stair-head right down among them. I think there were three, and my descent toppled them over. We rolled in a wild whirling mass and cascaded into the dining-room, where my head bumped violently on the parquet.

I expected a bit of a grapple, but none came. My wits were pretty woolly, but I managed to scramble to my feet. The heels of my enemies were disappearing up the staircase. Chapman was pawing my ribs to discover if there were any bones broken. There was not another soul in the room except two policeman who were pushing their way in from the street.

Chapman was flushed and breathing heavily: his coat had a big split down the seams at the shoulder, but his face was happy as a child's.

I caught his arm and spoke in his ear. "We've got to get out of this at once. How can we square these policemen? There must be no inquiry and nothing in the papers. Do you hear?"

"That's all right," said Chapman. "These bobbies are friends of mine, two good lads from Wensleydale. On my road here I told them to give me a bit of law and follow me, for I thought they might be wanted. They didn't come too soon to

spoil sport, for I've been knocking furriners about for ten minutes. You seem to have been putting up a tidy scrap yourself."

"Let's get home first," I said, for I was beginning to think of the bigger thing.

I wrote a chit for Macgillivray which I asked one of the constables to take to Scotland Yard. It was to beg that nothing should be done yet in the business of the restaurant, and above all, that nothing should get into the papers. Then I asked the other to see us home. It was a queer request for two able-bodied men to make on a summer evening in the busiest part of London, but I was taking no chances. The Power-House had declared war on me, and I knew it would be war without quarter.

I was in a fever to get out of that place. My momentary lust of battle had gone, and every stone of that building seemed to me a threat. Chapman would have liked to spend a happy hour rummaging through the house, but the gravity of my face persuaded him. The truth is, I was bewildered. I could not understand the reason of this sudden attack. Lumley's spies must long ago have told him enough to connect me with the Bokhara business. My visits to the Embassy alone were proof enough. But now he must have found out something new, something which startled him, or else there had been wild doings in Turkestan.

I won't forget that walk home in a hurry. It was a fine July twilight. The streets were full of the usual crowd, shop-girls in thin frocks, promenading clerks, and all the flotsam of a London

summer. You would have said it was the safest place on earth. But I was glad we had the policeman with us, who at the end of one beat passed us on to his colleague, and I was glad of Chapman. For I am morally certain I would never have got home alone.

The queer thing is that there was no sign of trouble till we got into Oxford Street. Then I became aware that there were people on these pavements who knew all about me. I first noticed it at the mouth of one of those little dark side-alleys which run up into mews and small dingy courts. I found myself being skilfully edged away from Chapman into the shadow, but I noticed it in time and butted my way back to the pavement. I couldn't make out who the people were who hustled me. They seemed nondescripts of all sorts, but I fancied there were women among them.

This happened twice, and I got wary, but I was nearly caught before we reached Oxford Circus. There was a front of a big shop rebuilding, and the usual wooden barricade with a gate. Just as we passed it there was a special throng on the pavement, and I, being next the wall, got pushed against the gate. Suddenly it gave, and I was pressed inward. I was right inside before I realised my danger, and the gate was closing. There must have been people there, but I could see nothing in the gloom.

It was no time for false pride. I yelled to Chapman, and the next second his burly shoulder was in the gap. The hustlers vanished, and I seemed to hear a polite voice begging my pardon.

After that Chapman and I linked arms and struck across Mayfair. But I did not feel safe till I was in the flat with the door bolted.

We had a long drink, and I stretched myself in an arm-chair, for I was as tired as if I had come out of a big game of Rugby football.

"I owe you a good deal, old man," I said. "I think I'll join the Labour Party. You can tell your fellows to send me their whips. What possessed you to come to look for me?"

The explanation was simple. I had mentioned the restaurant in my telephone message, and the name had awakened a recollection in Chapman's mind. He could not fix it at first, but by-and-by he remembered that the place had cropped up in the Routh case. Routh's London headquarters had been at the restaurant in Antioch Street. As soon as he remembered this he got into a taxi and descended at the corner of the street, where by sheer luck he fell in with his Wensleydale friends.

He said he had marched into the restaurant and found it empty but for an ill-favoured manager who denied all knowledge of me. Then, fortunately, he chose to make certain by shouting my name, and heard my answer. After that he knocked the manager down, and was presently assaulted by several men whom he described as "furrin muck." They had knives, of which he made very little, for he seems to have swung a table as a battering-ram and left sore limbs behind him.

He was at the top of his form. "I haven't enjoyed anything so much since I was a lad at

school," he informed me. "I was beginning to think your Power-House was a wash-out, but Lord! it's been busy enough to-night. This is what I call life!"

My spirits could not keep pace with his. The truth is that I was miserably puzzled—not afraid so much as mystified. I couldn't make out this sudden dead-set at me. Either they knew more than I bargained for, or I knew far too little.

"It's all very well," I said, "but I don't see how this is going to end. We can't keep up the pace long. At this rate it will be only a matter of hours till they get me."

We pretty well barricaded ourselves in the flat, and, at his earnest request, I restored to Chapman his revolver.

Then I got the clue I had been longing for. It was about eleven o'clock, while we were sitting smoking, when the telephone bell rang. It was Felix who spoke.

"I have news for you," he said. "The hunters have met the hunted, and one of the hunters is dead. The other is a prisoner in our hands. He has confessed."

It had been black murder in intent. The frontier police had shadowed the two men into the cup of a glen, where they met Tommy and Pitt-Heron. The four had spoken together for a little and then Tuke had fired deliberately at Charles and had grazed his ear. Whereupon Tommy had charged him and knocked the pistol from his hand. The assailant had fled, but a long shot from the police on the hillside had toppled him over. Tommy had felled Saronov with his fists, and the

man had abjectly surrendered. He had confessed, Felix said, but what the confession was he did not know.

VIII: I FIND SANCTUARY

MY nervousness and indecision dropped from me at the news. I had won the first round, and I would win the last, for it suddenly became clear to me that I had now evidence which would blast Lumley. I believed that it would not be hard to prove his identity with Pavia and his receipt of the telegram from Saronov; Tuke was his creature, and Tuke's murderous mission was his doing. No doubt I knew little and could prove nothing about the big thing, the Power-House, but conspiracy to murder is not the lightest of criminal charges. I was beginning to see my way to check-mating my friend, at least so far as Pitt-Heron was concerned. Provided—and it was a pretty big proviso—that he gave me the chance to use my knowledge.

That, I foresaw, was going to be the difficulty. What I knew now Lumley had known hours before. The reason of the affair at Antioch Street was now only too clear. If he believed that I had damning evidence against him—and there was no doubt he suspected it—then he would do his best to stop my mouth. I must get my statement lodged in the proper quarter at the earliest possible moment.

The next twenty-four hours, I feared, were going to be too sensational for comfort. And yet I cannot say that I was afraid. I was too full of

pride to be in a funk. I had lost my awe of Lumley through scoring a point against him. Had I known more I should have been less at my ease. It was this confidence which prevented me doing the obvious safe thing—ringing up Macgillivray, telling him the gist of my story, and getting him to put me under police protection. I thought I was clever enough to see the thing through myself. And it must have been the same over-confidence which prevented Lumley getting at me that night. An organisation like his could easily have got into the flat and done for us both. I suppose the explanation is that he did not yet know how much I knew, and was not ready to take the last steps in silencing me.

I sat up till the small hours, marshalling my evidence in a formal statement and making two copies of it. One was destined for Macgillivray and the other for Felix, for I was taking no risks. I went to bed and slept peacefully, and was awakened as usual by Waters. My man slept out, and used to turn up in the morning about seven. It was all so normal and homely that I could have believed my adventures of the night before a dream. In the summer sunlight the ways of darkness seemed very distant. I dressed in excellent spirits and made a hearty breakfast.

Then I gave the docile Chapman his instructions. He must take the document to Scotland Yard, ask to see Macgillivray, and put it into his hands. Then he must ring me up at once at Down Street and tell me that he had done this. I had already telephoned to my clerk that I would not be at the Temple that day.

It seems a simple thing to travel less than a mile in the most frequented part of London in broad daylight and perform an easy act like carrying a letter; but I knew that Lumley's spies would be active, and would connect Chapman sufficiently with me to think him worth following. In that case there might be an attempt at violence. I thought it my duty to tell him this, but he laughed me to scorn. He proposed to walk, and he begged to be shown the man who would meddle with him. Chapman, after last night, was prepared to take on all comers. He put my letter to Macgillivray in his inner pocket, buttoned his coat, crushed down his felt hat on his head, and defiantly set forth.

I expected a message from him in half an hour, for he was a rapid walker. But the half-hour passed, then the three-quarters, and nothing happened. At eleven I rang up Scotland Yard, but they had no news of him.

Then I became miserably anxious, for it was clear that some disaster had overtaken my messenger. My first impulse was to set out myself to look for him, but a moment's reflection convinced me that that would be playing into the enemy's hands. For an hour I wrestled with my impatience, and then a few minutes after twelve I was rung up by St. Thomas's Hospital.

A young doctor spoke, and said that Mr. Chapman had asked him to tell me what had happened. He had been run down by a motor-car at the corner of Whitehall—nothing serious—only a bad shake and some scalp wounds. In a day or so he would be able to leave.

Then he added what drove the blood from my

heart. "Mr. Chapman personally wished me to tell you," he said, "that the letter has gone." I stammered some reply asking his meaning. "He said he thinks," I was told, "that, while he was being assisted to his feet, his pocket was picked and a letter taken. He said you would know what he meant."

I knew only too well what he meant. Lumley had got my statement, and realised precisely how much I knew and what was the weight of evidence against him. Before he had only suspected, now he knew. He must know, too, that there would be a copy somewhere which I would try to deliver. It was going to be harder than I had fancied to get my news to the proper ears, and I had to anticipate the extreme of violence on the part of my opponents.

The thought of the peril restored my coolness. I locked the outer door of my flat and telephoned to the garage where I kept my car, bidding Stagg call for me at two o'clock precisely. Then I lit a pipe and strove to banish the whole business from my thoughts, for fussing would do me no good.

Presently it occurred to me to ring up Felix and give him some notion of the position. But I found that my telephone was now broken and connection was impossible. The spoken as well as the written word was to be denied me. That had happened in the last half-hour, and I didn't believe it was by accident. Also my man Waters, whom I had sent out on an errand after breakfast, had never returned. The state of siege had begun.

It was a blazing hot midsummer day. The water-carts were sprinkling Piccadilly, and looking

from my window I could see leisurely and elegant gentlemen taking their morning stroll. A florist's cart full of roses stood below me in the street. The summer smell of town—a mixture of tar, flowers, dust, and patchouli—rose in gusts through the hot air. It was the homely London I knew so well, and I was somehow an exile from it. I was being shepherded into a dismal isolation, which, unless I won help, might mean death. I was cool enough now, but I will not deny that I was miserably anxious. I cursed my false confidence the night before. By now I might have had Macgillivray and his men by my side. As it was, I wondered if I should ever see them.

I changed into a flannel suit, lunched off sandwiches and a whisky-and-soda, and at two o'clock looked for Stagg and my car. He was five minutes late, a thing which had never happened before. But I never welcomed anything so gladly as the sight of that car. I had hardly dared to hope that it would reach me.

My goal was the Embassy in Belgrave Square, but I was convinced that if I approached it directly I should share the fate of Chapman. Worse, for from me they would not merely snatch the letter. What I had once written I could write again, and if they wished to ensure my silence it must be by more drastic methods. I proposed to baffle my pursuers by taking a wide circuit round the western suburbs of London, returning to the Embassy when I thought the coast clear.

It was a tremendous relief to go down the stairs and emerge into the hot daylight. I gave Stagg his instructions, and lay back in the closed car with a

curious fluttering sense of anticipation. I had begun the last round in the wild game. There was a man at the corner of Down Street who seemed to peer curiously at the car. He was doubtless one of my watchers.

We went up Park Lane into the Edgware Road, my instructions to Stagg being to make a circuit by Harrow and Brentford. Now that I was ensconced in my car I felt a trifle safer, and my tense nerves relaxed. I grew drowsy and allowed myself to sink into a half doze. The stolid back of Stagg filled my gaze as it had filled it a fortnight ago on the western road, and I admired lazily the brick-red of his neck. He had been in the Guards, and a Boer bullet at Modder River had left a long scar at the nape of his neck, which gave to his hair the appearance of being badly cut. He had told me the story on Exmoor.

Suddenly I rubbed my eyes. There was no scar there; the hair of the chauffeur grew regularly down to his coat-collar. The resemblance had been perfect, the voice was Stagg's, but clearly it was not Stagg who now drove my car.

I pulled the blind down over the front window as if to shelter myself from the sun. Looking out, I saw that we were some distance up the Edgware Road, nearing the point where the Marylebone Road joins it. Now or never was my chance, for at the corner there is always a block in the traffic.

The car slowed down in obedience to a policeman's uplifted hand, and very gently I opened the door on the left side. Since the car was new it opened softly, and in two seconds I had stepped out, shut it again, and made a dive between a

butcher's cart and a motor-bus for the side-walk. I gave one glance back and saw the unconscious chauffeur still rigid at the wheel.

I dodged unobtrusively through the crowd on the pavement, with my hand on my breast-pocket to see that my paper was still there. There was a little picture-shop near by to which I used to go occasionally, owned by a man who was an adept at cleaning and restoring. I had sent him customers and he was likely to prove a friend. So I dived into his doorway, which made a cool pit of shade after the glaring street, and found him, spectacles on nose, busy examining some dusty prints.

He greeted me cordially and followed me into the back shop.

"Mr. Levison," I said, "have you a back door?"

He looked at me in some surprise. "Why, yes; there is the door into the lane which runs from Edgeley Street into Connaught Mews."

"Will you let me use it? There is a friend outside whom I wish to avoid. Such things happen, you know."

He smiled comprehendingly. "Certainly, sir. Come this way." And he led me through a dark passage hung with dingy Old Masters to a little yard filled with the debris of picture frames. There he unlocked a door in the wall and I found myself in a narrow alley. As I emerged I heard the bell of the shop-door ring. "If anyone inquires, you have not seen me here, remember," I said, and Mr. Levison nodded. He was an artist in his small way and liked the scent of a mystery.

I ran down the lane and by various cross streets made my way into Bayswater. I believed that I

had thrown my trackers for the moment off the scent, but I had got to get to the Embassy, and that neighbourhood was sure to be closely watched. I came out on the Bayswater Road pretty far west, and resolved to strike south-east across the Park. My reason was that the neighbourhood of Hyde Park Corner was certain at that time of day to be pretty well crowded, and I felt more security in a throng than in the empty streets of Kensington. Now that I come to think of it, it was a rash thing to do, for since Lumley knew the full extent of my knowledge, he was likely to deal more violently with me than with Chapman, and the seclusion of the Park offered him too good a chance.

I crossed the riding-track, and struck over the open space where the Sunday demonstrations are held. There was nothing there but nurses and perambulators, children at play, and dogs being exercised. Presently I reached Grosvenor Gate, where on the little green chairs well-dressed people were taking the air. I recognised several acquaintances, and stopped for a moment to talk to one of them. Then I emerged in Park Lane, and walked down it to Hamilton Place.

So far I thought I had not been followed, but now once more I had the indefinable but unerring sensation of being watched. I caught a man looking eagerly at me from the other side of the street, and it seemed to me that he made a sign to some one farther off. There was now less than a quarter of a mile between me and Belgrave Square, but I saw that it would be a hard course to cover.

Once in Piccadilly, there could be no doubt about my watchers. Lumley was doing the thing

in style this time. Last night it had only been a trial trip, but now the whole energies of the Power-House were on the job. The place was filled with the usual mid-season crowd, and I had to take off my hat several times. Up in the bow-window of the Bachelors' Club a young friend of mine was writing a letter and sipping a long drink with an air of profound boredom. I would have given much for his *ennui*, for my life at the moment was painfully exciting. I was alone in that crowd, isolated and proscribed, and there was no help save in my own wits. If I spoke to a policeman he would think me drunk or mad, and yet I was on the edge of being made the victim of a far subtler crime than fell within the purview of the Metropolitan force.

Now I saw how thin is the protection of civilisation. An accident and a bogus ambulance—a false charge and a bogus arrest—there were a dozen ways of spiriting me out of this gay, bustling world. I foresaw that, if I delayed, my nerve would break, so I boldly set off across the road.

I jolly nearly shared the fate of Chapman. A car which seemed about to draw up at a club door suddenly swerved across the street, and I had to dash to an island to escape it. It was no occasion to hesitate, so, dodging a bus and missing a motor-bicycle by a hair's-breadth, I rushed across the remaining distance and reached the railings of the Green Park.

Here there were fewer people, and several queer things began to happen. A little group of workmen with their tools were standing by the kerb, and they suddenly moved towards me. A pavement artist, who looked like a cripple, scrambled to

his feet and moved in the same direction. There was a policeman at the corner, and I saw a well-dressed man go up to him, say something and nod in my direction, and the policeman too began to move towards me.

I did not await them. I took to my heels and ran for my life down Grosvenor Place.

Long ago at Eton I had won the school mile, and at Oxford I was second string for the quarter. But never at Eton or at Oxford did I run as I ran then. It was blisteringly hot, but I did not feel it, for my hands were clammy and my heart felt like a cold stone. I did not know how the pursuit got on, for I did not think of it. I did not reflect what kind of spectacle I must afford running like a thief in a London thoroughfare on a June afternoon. I only knew that my enemies were around and behind me, and that in front, a few hundred yards away, lay safety.

But even as I ran I had the sense to think out my movements, and to realise that the front door of the Embassy was impossible. For one thing, it would be watched, and for another, before the solemn footmen opened it, my pursuers would be upon me. My only hope was the back door.

I twisted into the Mews behind the north side of the Square, and as I turned I saw two men run up from the Square as if to cut me off. A whistle was blown, and more men appeared—one entering from the far end of the Mews, one darting from a public-house door, and one sliding down a ladder from a stable-loft. This last was nearest me, and tried to trip me, but I rejoice to say that a left-hander on the chin sent him sprawling on the

cobbles. I remembered that the Embassy was the fifth house from the end, and feverishly I tried to count the houses by their backs. It is not so easy as it sounds, for the modern London householder studs his back premises with excrescences which seem to melt into his neighbour's. In the end I had to make a guess at the door, which, to my joy, was unlocked. I rushed in and banged it behind me.

I found myself in a stone passage, with on one side a door opening on a garage. There was a wooden staircase leading to an upper floor, and a glass door in front, which opened into a large dis-used room full of boxes. Beyond were two doors, one of which was locked. The other abutted on a steep iron stairway, which obviously led to the lower regions of the house.

I ran down the stair—it was no more than a ladder—crossed a small courtyard, traversed a passage, and burst into the kitchen, where I confronted an astonished white-capped *chef* in the act of lifting a pot from the fire.

His face was red and wrathful, and I thought that he was going to fling the pot at my head. I had disturbed him in some delicate operation, and his artist's pride was outraged.

"Monsieur," I stammered in French, "I seek your pardon for my intrusion. There were circumstances which compelled me to enter this house by the back premises. I am an acquaintance of his Excellency, your patron, and an old friend of Monsieur Felix. I beg you of your kindness to direct me to Monsieur Felix's room, or to bid some one take me there."

My abject apologies mollified him.

"It is a grave offence, Monsieur," he said, "an unparalleled offence, to enter my kitchen at this hour. I fear you have irremediably spoiled the new casserole dish that I was endeavouring to compose."

I was ready to go on my knees to the offended artist.

"It grieves me indeed to have interfered with so rare an art, which I have often admired at his Excellency's table. But there is danger behind me, and an urgent mission in front. Monsieur will forgive me? Necessity will sometimes overrule the finest sensibility."

He bowed to me, and I bowed to him, and my pardon was assured.

Suddenly a door opened, another than that by which I had entered, and a man appeared whom I took to be a footman. He was struggling into his livery coat, but at the sight of me he dropped it. I thought I recognised the face as that of the man who had emerged from the public-house and tried to cut me off.

"'Ere, Mister Alphonse," he cried, "'elp me to collar this man. The police are after 'im."

"You forget, my friend," I said, "that an Embassy is privileged ground which the police can't enter. I desire to be taken before his Excellency."

"So that's yer game," he shouted. "But two can play at that. 'Ere, give me an 'and, moosoo, and we'll 'ave him in the street in a jiffey. There's two 'undred of the best in our pockets if we 'ands 'im over to them as wants 'im."

The cook looked puzzled and a little frightened.

“ Will you allow them to outrage your kitchen—an Embassy kitchen, too—without your consent ? ” I said.

“ What have you done ? ” he asked in French.

“ Only what your patron will approve,” I replied in the same tongue. “ *Messieurs les assassins* have a grudge against me.”

He still hesitated, while the young footman advanced on me. He was fingering something in his trousers-pocket which I did not like.

Now was the time when, as they say in America, I should have got busy with my gun ; but alas ! I had no gun. I feared supports for the enemy, for the footman at the first sight of me had run back the way he had come, and I had heard a low whistle.

What might have happened I do not know, had not the god appeared from the machine in the person of Hewins, the butler.

“ Hewins,” I said, “ you know me. I have often dined here, and you know that I am a friend of Monsieur Felix. I am on my way to see him on an urgent matter, and for various reasons I had to enter by Monsieur Alphonse’s kitchen. Will you take me at once to Monsieur Felix ? ”

Hewins bowed, and on his imperturbable face there appeared no sign of surprise. “ This way, sir,” was all he said.

As I followed him I saw the footman plucking nervously at the something in his trousers-pocket. Lumley’s agents apparently had not always the courage to follow his instructions to the letter, for I made no doubt that the order had been to take me alive or dead.

I found Felix alone, and flung myself into an arm-chair. "My dear chap," I said, "take my advice and advise His Excellency to sack the red-haired footman."

From that moment I date that sense of mastery over a situation which drives out fear. I had been living for weeks under a dark pall, and suddenly the skies had lightened. I had found sanctuary. Whatever happened to me now the worst was past, for I had done my job.

Felix was looking at me curiously, for, jaded, scarlet, dishevelled, I was an odd figure for a London afternoon. "Things seem to have been marching fast with you," he said.

"They have, but I think the march is over. I want to ask several favours. First, here is a document which sets out certain facts. I shall ring up Macgillivray at Scotland Yard and ask him to come here at 9.30 this evening. When he comes I want you to give him this and ask him to read it at once. He will know how to act on it."

Felix nodded. "And the next?"

"Give me a telegraph form. I want a wire sent at once by some one who can be trusted." He handed me a form and I wrote out a telegram to Lumley at the Albany, saying that I proposed to call upon him that evening at eight sharp, and asking him to receive me.

"Next?" said Felix.

"Next and last, I want a room with a door which will lock, a hot bath, and something to eat about seven. I might be permitted to taste Monsieur Alphonse's new casserole dish."

I rang up Macgillivray, reminded him of his

promise, and told him what awaited him at 9.30. Then I had a wash, and afterwards at my leisure gave Felix a sketch of the day's doings. I have never felt more completely at my ease, for whatever happened I was certain that I had spoiled Lumley's game. He would know by now that I had reached the Embassy, and that any further attempts on my life and liberty were futile. My telegram would show him that I was prepared to offer terms, and I would certainly be permitted to reach the Albany unmolested. To the meeting with my adversary I looked forward without qualms, but with the most lively interest. I had my own theories about that distinguished criminal, and I hoped to bring them to the proof.

Just before seven I had a reply to my wire. Mr. Lumley said he would be delighted to see me. The telegram was directed to me at the Embassy, though I had put no address on the one I sent. Lumley, of course, knew all my movements. I could picture him sitting in his chair, like some Chief of Staff, receiving every few minutes the reports of his agents. All the same, Napoleon had fought his Waterloo.

IX: THE POWER-HOUSE

I LEFT Belgrave Square about a quarter to eight and retraced my steps along the route which for me that afternoon had been so full of tremors. I was still being watched—a little observation told me that—but I would not be interfered with, provided my way lay in a certain direction. So completely without nervousness

was I that at the top of Constitution Hill I struck into the Green Park and kept to the grass till I emerged into Piccadilly opposite Devonshire House. A light wind had risen, and the evening had grown pleasantly cool. I met several men I knew going out to dinner on foot, and stopped to exchange greetings. From my clothes they thought I had just returned from a day in the country.

I reached the Albany as the clock was striking eight. Lumley's rooms were on the first floor, and I was evidently expected, for the porter himself conducted me to them and waited by me till the door was opened by a manservant.

You know those *rococo*, late Georgian, Albany rooms, large, square, clumsily corniced. Lumley's was lined with books, which I saw at a glance were of a different type from those in his working library at his country house. This was the collection of a bibliophile, and in the light of the summer evening the rows of tall volumes in vellum and morocco lined the walls like some rich tapestry.

The valet retired and shut the door, and presently from a little inner chamber came his master. He was dressed for dinner, and wore more than ever the air of the eminent diplomat. Again I had the old feeling of incredulity. It was the Lumley I had met two nights before at dinner, the friend of Viceroys and Cabinet Ministers. It was hard to connect him with Antioch Street or the red-haired footman with a pistol. Or with Tuke? Yes, I decided, Tuke fitted into the frame. Both were brains cut loose from the decencies that make life possible.

"Good evening, Mr. Leithen," he said pleasantly.

"As you have fixed the hour of eight, may I offer you dinner?"

"Thank you," I replied, "but I have already dined. I have chosen an awkward time, but my business need not take long."

"So?" he said. "I am always glad to see you at any hour."

"And I prefer to see the master rather than the subordinates who have been infesting my life during the past week."

We both laughed. "I am afraid you have had some annoyance, Mr. Leithen," he said. "But remember, I gave you fair warning."

"True. And I have come to do the same kindness to you. That part of the game, at any rate, is over."

"Over?" he queried, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, over," I said, and took out my watch. "Let us be quite frank with each other, Mr. Lumley. There is really very little time to waste. As you have doubtless read the paper which you stole from my friend this morning, you know more or less the extent of my information."

"Let us have frankness by all means. Yes, I have read your paper. A very creditable piece of work, if I may say so. You will rise in your profession, Mr. Leithen. But surely you must realise that it carries you a very little way."

"In a sense you are right. I am not in a position to reveal the full extent of your misdeeds. Of the Power-House and its doings I can only guess. But Pitt-Heron is on his way home, and he will be carefully safeguarded on that journey. Your creature, Saronov, has confessed. We shall know

more very soon, and meantime I have clear evidence which implicates you in a conspiracy to murder."

He did not answer, but I wished I could see behind his tinted spectacles to the look in his eyes. I think he had not been quite prepared for the line I took.

"I need not tell you, as a lawyer, Mr. Leithen," he said at last, "that what seems good evidence on paper is often feeble enough in Court. You cannot suppose that I will tamely plead guilty to your charges. On the contrary, I will fight them with all the force that brains and money can give. You are an ingenious young man, but you are not the brightest jewel of the English Bar."

"That also is true. I do not deny that some of my evidence may be weakened at the trial. It is even conceivable that you may be acquitted on some technical doubt. But you have forgotten one thing. From the day you leave the Court you will be a suspected man. The police of all Europe will be on your trail. You have been highly successful in the past, and why? Because you have been above suspicion, an honourable and distinguished gentleman, belonging to the best clubs, counting as your acquaintances the flower of our society. Now you will be a suspect, a man with a past, a centre of strange stories. I put it to you—how far are you likely to succeed under these conditions?"

He laughed.

"You have a talent for character-drawing, my friend. What makes you think that I can work only if I live in the limelight of popularity?"

"The talent you mention," I said. "As I read your character—and I think I am right—you are an artist in crime. You are not the common cut-throat who acts out of passion or greed. No, I think you are something subtler than that. You love power, hidden power. You flatter your vanity by despising mankind and making them your tools. You scorn the smattering of inaccuracies which passes for human knowledge, and I will not venture to say you are wrong. Therefore, you use your brains to frustrate it. Unhappily the life of millions is built on that smattering, so you are a foe to society. But there would be no flavour in controlling subterranean things if you were yourself a mole working in the dark. To get the full flavour, the irony of it all, you must live in the light. I can imagine you laughing in your soul as you move about our world, praising it with your lips, patting it with your hands, and kicking its props away with your feet. I can see the charm of it. But it is over now."

"Over?" he asked.

"Over," I repeated. "The end has come—the utter, final, and absolute end."

He made a sudden, odd, nervous movement, pushing his glasses close back upon his eyes.

"What about yourself?" he said hoarsely.

"Do you think you can play against me without suffering desperate penalties?"

He was holding a cord in his hand with a knob on the end of it. He now touched a button in the knob, and there came the faint sound of a bell.

The door was behind me, and he was looking

beyond me towards it. I was entirely at his mercy, but I never budged an inch. I do not know how I managed to keep calm, but I did it, and without much effort. I went on speaking, conscious that the door had opened and that some one was behind me.

"It is really quite useless trying to frighten me. I am safe, because I am dealing with an intelligent man, and not with the ordinary half-witted criminal. You do not want my life in silly revenge. If you call in your man and strangle me between you what earthly good would it do you?"

He was looking beyond me, and the passion—a sudden white-hot passion like an epilepsy—was dying out of his face.

"A mistake, James," he said. "You can go."

The door closed softly at my back.

"Yes. A mistake. I have a considerable admiration for you, Mr. Lumley, and should be sorry to be disappointed."

He laughed quite like an ordinary mortal. "I am glad this affair is to be conducted on a basis of mutual respect. Now that the melodramatic overture is finished let us get to the business."

"By all means," I said. "I promised to deal with you frankly. Well, let me put my last cards on the table. At half-past nine precisely the duplicate of that statement of mine which you annexed this morning will be handed to Scotland Yard. I may add that the authorities there know me, and are proceeding under my advice. When they read that statement they will act on it. You have therefore about one hour and a half, or say one and three-quarters, to make up your mind.

You can still secure your freedom, but it must be elsewhere than in England."

He had risen to his feet, and was pacing up and down the room.

"Will you oblige me by telling me one thing," he said. "If you believe me to be, as you say, a dangerous criminal, how do you reconcile it with your conscience to give me a chance of escape? It is your duty to bring me to justice."

"I will tell you why," I said. "I, too, have a weak joint in my armour. Yours is that you can only succeed under the disguise of high respectability. That disguise, in any case, will be stripped from you. Mine is Pitt-Heron. I do not know how far he has entangled himself with you, but I know something of his weakness, and I don't want his career ruined and his wife's heart broken. He has learned his lesson, and will never mention you and your schemes to a mortal soul. Indeed, if I can help it, he will never know that any one shares his secret. The price of the chance of escape I offer you is that Pitt-Heron's past be buried for ever."

He did not answer. He had his arms folded, walking up and down the room, and suddenly he seemed to have aged enormously. I had the impression that I was dealing with a very old man.

"Mr. Leithen," he said at last, "you are bold. You have a frankness which almost amounts to genius. You are wasted in your stupid profession, but your speculative powers are not equal to your other endowments, so you will probably remain in it, deterred by an illogical scruple from following your true bent. Your true *métier*, believe me, is what shallow people call crime. Speaking 'without

prejudice,' as the idiot solicitors say, it would appear that we have both weak spots in our cases. Mine, you say, is that I can only work by using the conventions of what we agreed to call the Machine. There may be truth in that. Yours is that you have a friend who lacks your iron-clad discretion. You offer a plan which saves both our weaknesses. By the way, what is it?"

I looked at my watch again. "You have ample time to catch the night express to Paris."

"And if not?"

"Then I am afraid there may be trouble with the police between ten and eleven o'clock."

"Which, for all our sakes, would be a pity. Do you know you interest me uncommonly, for you confirm the accuracy of my judgment. I have always had a notion that some day I should run across, to my sorrow, just such a man as you. A man of very great intellectual power I can deal with, for that kind of brain is usually combined with the sort of high-strung imagination on which I can work. The same with your over-imaginative man. Yes, Pitt-Heron was of that type. Ordinary brains do not trouble me, for I puzzle them. Now, you are a man of good commonplace intelligence. Pray forgive the lukewarmness of the phrase; it is really a high compliment, for I am an austere critic. If you were that and no more you would not have succeeded. But you possess also a quite irrelevant gift of imagination. Not enough to upset your balance, but enough to do what your mere lawyer's talent could never have done. You have achieved a feat which is given to few—you have partially understood me. Believe me, I rate

you high. You are the kind of foursquare being, bedded in the concrete of our civilisation, on whom I have always felt I might some day come to grief. . . . No, no, I am not trying to wheedle you. If I thought I could do that I should be sorry, for my discernment would have been at fault."

"I warn you," I said, "that you are wasting precious time."

He laughed quite cheerfully.

"I believe you are really anxious about my interests," he said. "That is a triumph indeed. Do you know, Mr. Leithen, it is a mere whimsy of fate that you are not my disciple. If we had met earlier, and under other circumstances, I should have captured you. It is because you have in you a capacity for discipleship that you have succeeded in your opposition."

"I abominate you and all your works," I said, "but I admire your courage."

He shook his head gently.

"It is the wrong word. I am not courageous. To be brave means that you have conquered fear, but I have never had any fear to conquer. Believe me, Mr. Leithen, I am quite impervious to threats. You come to me to-night and hold a pistol to my head. You offer me two alternatives, both of which mean failure. But how do you know that I regard them as failure? I have had what they call a good run for my money. No man since Napoleon has tasted such power. I may be willing to end it. Age creeps on and power may grow burdensome. I have always sat loose from common ambitions and common affections. For all you know I may regard you as a benefactor."

All this talk looks futile when it is written down, but it was skilful enough, for it was taking every atom of exhilaration out of my victory. It was not idle brag. Every syllable rang true, as I knew in my bones. I felt myself in the presence of something enormously big, as if a small barbarian was desecrating the colossal Zeus of Pheidias with a coal hammer. But I also felt it inhuman, and I hated it, and I clung to that hatred.

"You fear nothing and you believe nothing," I said. "Man, you should never have been allowed to live."

He raised a deprecating hand. "I am a sceptic about most things," he said, "but, believe me, I have my own worship. I venerate the intellect of man. I believe in its undreamed-of possibilities, when it grows free like an oak in the forest and is not dwarfed in a flower-pot. From that allegiance I have never wavered. That is the God I have never forsworn."

I took out my watch.

"Permit me again to remind you that time presses."

"True," he said, smiling. "The Continental express will not wait upon my confession. Your plan is certainly conceivable. There may be other and easier ways. I am not certain. I must think. . . . Perhaps it would be wiser if you left me now, Mr. Leithen. If I take your advice there will be various things to do. . . . In any case there will be much to do. . . ."

He led me to the door as if he were an ordinary host speeding an ordinary guest. I remember that on my way he pointed out a set of Aldines and

called my attention to their beauty. He shook hands quite cordially and remarked on the fineness of the weather. That was the last I saw of this amazing man.

It was with profound relief that I found myself in Piccadilly in the wholesome company of my kind. I had carried myself boldly enough in the last hour, but I would not have gone through it again for a king's ransom. Do you know what it is to deal with a pure intelligence, a brain stripped of every shred of humanity? It is like being in the company of a snake.

I drove to the club and telephoned to Macgillivray, asking him to take no notice of my statement till he heard from me in the morning. Then I went to the hospital to see Chapman.

That Leader of the People was in a furious temper, and he was scarcely to be appeased by my narrative of the day's doings. Your Labour Member is the greatest of all sticklers for legality, and the outrage he had suffered that morning had grievously weakened his trust in public security. The Antioch Street business had seemed to him eminently right ; if you once got mixed up in melodrama you had to expect such things. But for a Member of Parliament to be robbed in broad daylight next door to the House of Commons upset the foundations of his faith. There was little the matter with his body, and the doctor promised that he would be allowed up next day, but his soul was a mass of bruises.

It took me a lot of persuasion to get him to keep quiet. He wanted a public exposure of Lumley, a big trial, a general ferreting out of secret agents,

the whole winding up with a speech in Parliament by himself on this latest outrage of Capitalism. Gloomily he listened to my injunction to silence. But he saw the reason of it, and promised to hold his tongue out of loyalty to Tommy. I knew that Pitt-Heron's secret was safe with him.

As I crossed Westminster Bridge on my way home, the night express to the Continent rumbled over the river. I wondered if Lumley was on board, or if he had taken one of the other ways of which he had spoken. . . .

X: RETURN OF THE WILD GEESE

I DO not think I was surprised at the news I read in *The Times* next morning.

Mr. Andrew Lumley had died suddenly in the night of heart failure, and the newspapers woke up to the fact that we had been entertaining a great man unawares. There was an obituary in "leader" type of nearly two columns. He had been older than I thought—close on seventy—and *The Times* spoke of him as a man who might have done anything he pleased in public life, but had chosen to give to a small coterie of friends what was due to the country. I read of his wit and learning, his amazing connoisseurship, his social gifts, his personal charm. According to the writer, he was the finest type of cultivated amateur, a Beckford with more than a Beckford's wealth and none of his folly. Large private charities were hinted at, and a hope was expressed that some part at least of his collections might come to the nation.

The popular papers said the same thing in their own way. One declared he reminded it of Atticus, another of Mæcenæas, another of Lord Houghton. There must have been a great run on biographical dictionaries in the various offices. Chapman's own particular rag said that, although this kind of philanthropist was a dilettante and a back number, yet Mr. Lumley was a good specimen of the class and had been a true friend to the poor. I thought Chapman would have a fit when he read this. After that he took in the *Morning Post*.

It was no business of mine to explode the myth. Indeed I couldn't even if I had wanted to, for no one would have believed me unless I produced proofs, and these proofs were not to be made public. Besides, I had an honest compunction. He had had, as he expressed it, a good run for his money, and I wanted the run to be properly rounded off.

Three days later I went to the funeral. It was a wonderful occasion. Two eminent statesmen were among the pall-bearers, Royalty was represented, and there were wreaths from learned societies and scores of notable people. It was a queer business to listen to that stately service, which was never read over stranger dust. I was thinking all the time of the vast subterranean machine which he had controlled, and which now was so much old iron. I could dimly imagine what his death meant to the hosts who had worked blindly at his discretion. He was a Napoleon who left no Marshals behind him. From the Power-House came no wreaths or newspaper tributes, but I knew that it had lost its power. . . .

De mortuis, etc. My task was done, and it only remained to get Pitt-Heron home.

Of the three people in London besides myself who knew the story—Macgillivray, Chapman, and Felix—the two last might be trusted to be silent, and Scotland Yard is not in the habit of publishing its information. Tommy, of course, must some time or other be told; it was his right; but I knew that Tommy would never breathe a word of it. I wanted Charles to believe that his secret died with Lumley, for otherwise I don't think he would have ever come back to England.

The thing took some arranging, for we could not tell him directly about Lumley's death without giving away the fact that we knew of the connection between the two. We had to approach it by a roundabout road. I got Felix to arrange to have the news telegraphed to and inserted by special order in a Russian paper which Charles could not avoid seeing.

The device was successful. Calling at Portman Square a few days later, I learned from Ethel Pitt-Heron's glowing face that her troubles were over. That same evening a cable to me from Tommy announced the return of the wanderers.

It was the year of the Chilian Arbitration, in which I held a junior brief for the British Government, and that and the late sitting of Parliament kept me in London after the end of the term. I had had a bad reaction from the excitements of the summer, and in those days I was feeling pretty well hipped and overdone. On a hot August afternoon I met Tommy again.

The sun was shining through my Temple chambers, much as it had done when he started. So far as I remember, the West Ham brief which had aroused his contempt was still adorning my table. I was very hot and cross and fagged, for I had been engaged in the beastly job of comparing half a dozen maps of a despicable little bit of South American frontier.

Suddenly the door opened, and Tommy, lean and sunburnt, stalked in.

"Still at the old grind," he cried, after we had shaken hands. "Fellows like you give me a notion of the meaning of Eternity."

"The same uneventful, sedentary life," I replied. "Nothing happens except that my scale of fees grows. I suppose nothing *will* happen till the conductor comes to take the tickets. I shall soon grow fat."

"I notice it already, my lad. You want a bit of waking up or you'll get a liver. A little sensation would do you a pot of good."

"And you?" I asked. "I congratulate you on your success. I hear you have retrieved Pitt-Heron for his mourning family."

Tommy's laughing eyes grew solemn.

"I have had the time of my life," he said. "It was like a chapter out of the *Arabian Nights* with a dash of Fenimore Cooper. I feel as if I had lived years since I left England in May. While you have been sitting among your musty papers we have been riding like moss-troopers and seeing men die. Come and dine to-night and hear about our adventures. I can't tell you the full story, for I don't know it, but there is enough to curl your hair."

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Then I achieved my first and last score at the expense of Tommy Deloraine.

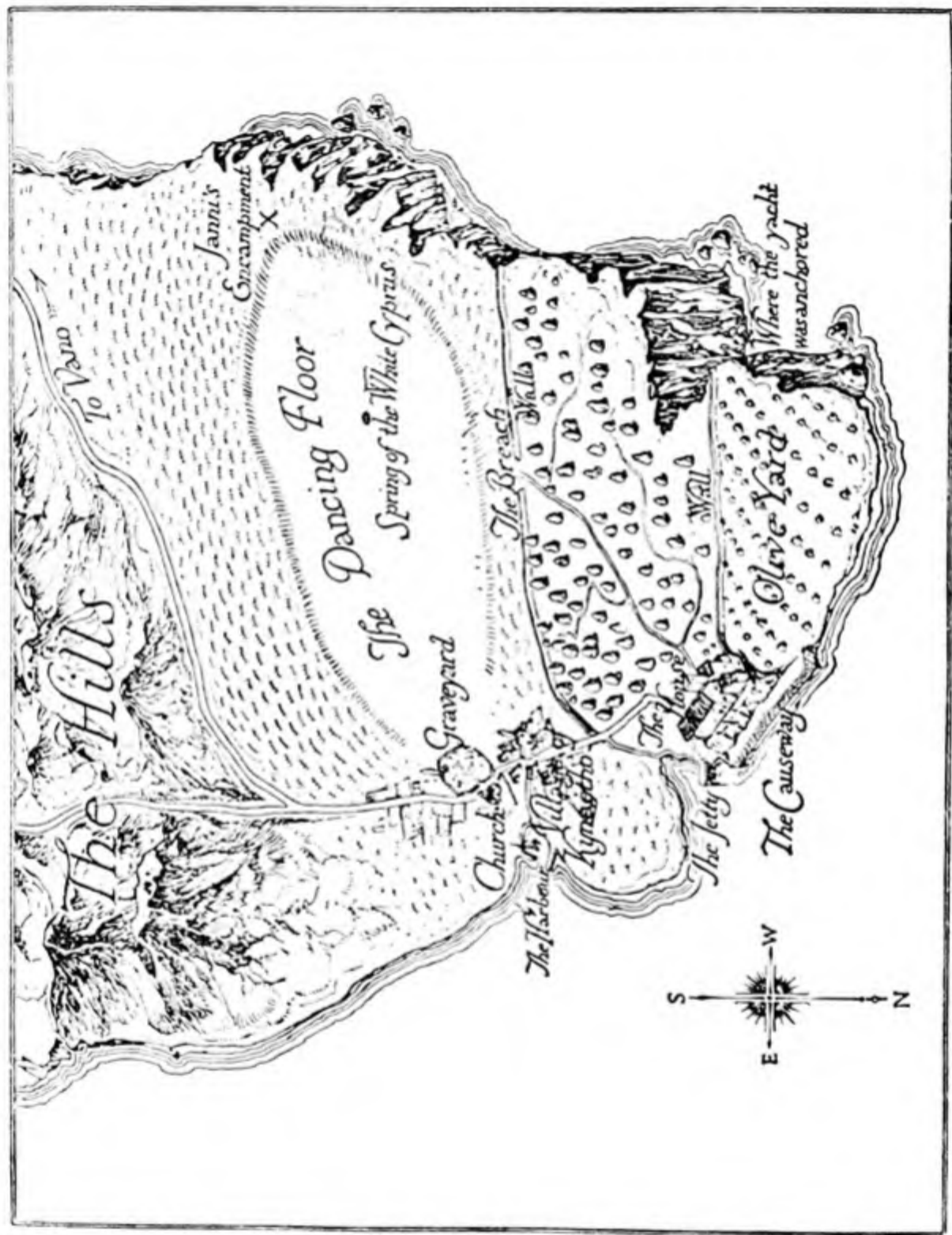
"No," I said, "you will dine with me instead, and *I* will tell you the full story. All the papers on the subject are over there in my safe."

THE DANCING FLOOR

سماں میں سار کا بہا رکے یہ میلے -
اے میں نکلوں جو کے اکیچے
اے میں ڈر ہے جاؤ و نکرے جو کا

qts translatin.

See phase 432



THE ISLAND OF PLAKOS AS SEEN FROM THE NORTH

THE DANCING FLOOR PART I

This story was told me by Leithen, as we were returning rather late in the season from a shooting holiday in North Ontario. There were few passengers, the weather was a succession of snow blizzards and gales, and as we had the smoking-room for the most part to ourselves, we stoked up the fire and fell into a mood of yarns and reminiscences. Leithen, being a lawyer, has a liking for careful detail, and his tale took long in the telling; indeed, snatches of it filled the whole of that rough October passage. The version I have written out is amplified from his narrative, but I think it is accurate, for he took the trouble to revise it.

XI: SEVERNS

ROMANCE (he said) is a word I am shy of using. It has been so staled and pawed by fools that the bloom is gone from it, and to most people it stands for a sugary world as flat as an eighteenth-century Arcadia. But, dry stick as I am, I hanker after my own notion of romance. I suppose it is the lawyer in me, but I define it as something in life which happens with an exquisite aptness and a splendid finality, as if Fate had suddenly turned artist—something which catches the breath because it is so wholly right. Also for me it must

NOTE.—An episode in this tale is taken from a short story of mine entitled "Basilissa," published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1914.

J. B.

happen to youth. I do not complain of growing old, but I like to keep my faith that at one stage in our mortal existence nothing is impossible. It is part of my belief that the universe is on the whole friendly to man and that the ordering of the world is in the main benevolent. . . . So I go about expecting things, waiting like an old pagan for the descent of the goddess. And once—only once—I caught the authentic shimmer of her wings.

I

My story begins in January 1913, when I took my nephew Charles to dine with the Amysforts for a ball they were giving. Balls are not much in my line, for when I came first to London it was the foolish fashion of young men not to dance, but to lounge superciliously in doorways, while their elders took the floor. I had a good deal of work on hand, and I meant to leave immediately after dinner, but the necessity of launching Charles made me linger through the first few dances. My nephew was a cheerful young gentleman in his second year at Oxford, and it presently appeared that he did not want for friends of his own age. There was a perpetual bandying of nicknames and occult chaff with other fresh-coloured boys.

One in particular caught my attention. He was a tall young man of about Charles's age, who was not dancing but stood beside one of the windows with his head silhouetted against a dark curtain. He was uncommonly handsome after the ordinary English pattern, but our youth is mostly good to behold and that would not have fixed my attention. What struck me was his pose. He was

looking at the pretty spectacle with a curious aloofness—with eyes that received much but gave out nothing. I have never seen anyone so completely detached, so clothed with his own atmosphere, and since that is rare at the age of twenty, I asked Charles if he knew him.

“Rather. It’s old Milburne. He’s up at Magdalen with me. First string for the ‘Varsity mile. Believed”—his voice became reverential—“to be going to knock five seconds off his last year’s time. Most awful good chap. Like me to introduce you?”

The young man in response to my nephew’s beckoning approached us. “Hullo, Vernon, how’s life?” said my nephew. “Want to introduce you to my uncle—Sir Edward Leithen—big legal swell, you know—good fellow to have behind you if you run up against the laws of England.”

Charles left us to claim a partner, and I exchanged a few commonplaces with his friend, for I too—*consule Planco*—had run the mile. Our short talk was the merest platitudes, but my feeling about his odd distinction was intensified. There was something old-fashioned in his manner—wholly self-possessed yet with no touch of priggishness—a little formal, as if he had schooled himself to be urbanely and delicately on his guard. My guess at the time was that he had foreign blood in him, not from any difference of colouring or feature, but from his silken reserve. We of the North are apt to be angular in our silences; we have not learned the art of gracious reticence.

That boy’s face remained clearly fixed in my memory. It is a thing that often happens to me,

for without any reason on earth I will carry about with me pictures of some casual witnesses or clients whom I am bound to recognise if I ever see them again. It is as freakish a gift as that which makes some men remember scraps of doggerel. I saw the face so vividly in my mind that, if I had been an artist, I could have drawn it accurately down to the finest lines of the mouth and the wary courtesy of the eyes. I do not suppose I gave the meeting another conscious thought, for I was desperately busy at the time, but I knew that I had added another portrait to the lumber-room of my absurd memory.

I had meant to go to Scotland that Easter vacation to fish, but a sudden pressure of Crown cases upset all my plans, and I had to limit my holiday to four days. I wanted exercise, so I took it in the most violent form, and went for a walk in the Westmorland hills. The snow lay late that year, and I got the exercise I sought scrambling up icy gullies and breasting north-easters on the long bleak ridges. All went well till the last day, which I spent among the Cartmel fells, intending to catch a train at an obscure station which would enable me to join the night mail for London at Lancaster. You know how those little hills break down in stony shelves to the sea. Well, as luck would have it, I stepped into a hole between two boulders masked with snow, and crawled out with the unpleasing certainty that I had either broken or badly wrenched my ankle. By the time I had hobbled down to the beginning of the stone-walled pastures I knew that it was a twist and not a break, but before I reached a road I knew also

that I would never reach the station in time for my train.

It had begun to snow again, the spring dusk was falling, and the place was very lonely. My watch told me that even if I found a farm or inn and hired a trap I should miss my train. The only chance was to get a motor-car to take me to Lancaster. But there was no sign of farm or inn—only interminable dusky snowy fields, and the road was too small and obscure to make a friendly motor-car probable. I limped along in a very bad temper. It was not a matter of desperate urgency that I should be in London next morning, though delay would mean the postponement of a piece of business I wanted to get finished. But the prospect was black for my immediate comfort. The best I could look forward to was a bed in a farm or a wayside public-house, and a slow and painful journey next day. I was angry with myself for my clumsiness. I had thought my ankles beyond reproach, and it was ridiculous that after three days on rough and dangerous mountains I should come to grief on a paltry hillock.

The dusk thickened, and not a soul did I meet. Presently woods began to creep around the road, and I walked between two patches of blackness in a thin glimmer of twilight which would soon be gone. I was cold and hungry and rather tired, and my ankle gave me a good deal of pain. I tried to think where I was, and could only remember that the station, which had been my immediate objective, was still at least six miles distant. I had out my map and wasted half a dozen matches on it, but it was a map of the hill country and stopped

short of my present whereabouts. Very soon I had come to a determination to stop at the first human habitation, were it a labourer's cottage, and throw myself upon the compassion of its inmates. But not a flicker of light could I see to mark the presence of man.

Then something white glimmered faintly on my left, and I saw that it was a wicket gate. This must mean a house near at hand, so I hopefully pushed it open and entered. I found myself in a narrow path running among fir-trees. It was nearly pitch-dark in that place, and I was in fear of losing the road, which was obscured by the fallen snow, and getting lost in a wood. Soon, however, I was clear of the firs and in more open country among what looked like beeches. The wind, too, had swept the path bare, and there was just enough light to make it out as it twined up and down a little glade. I suspected that I was in a demesne of some considerable house, and the suspicion became a certainty when my track emerged on a broad gravel drive. After that my way was clear. The drive took me into a park—I knew it was a park because of the frequent swing-gates for cattle—and suddenly it bore to the right and I saw half a dozen irregularly placed lights high up in the air before me. This was the house, and it must be a large one, for some of the lights were far apart.

Five minutes later I found myself ringing the bell in a massive pillared porch, and explaining my case to a very old butler, to whom I gave my card.

“I’ve had an accident on the hills,” I said, “and

twisted my ankle rather badly. I wonder if I might ask for some assistance—to get to an inn or a station. I'm afraid I don't in the least know where I am."

"This is Severns Hall, sir," said the man. "My master is Mr. Vernon Milburne. If you will come in, sir, I will acquaint him with the position."

"Mr. Vernon Milburne?" I cried. "I believe I have met him. I think he is at Oxford with my nephew."

"Mr. Milburne is a member of the University of Oxford," said the ancient man. He led me into a vast hall of the worst kind of Victorian Gothic, in which a big bright wood fire crackled. When he saw me clearly the butler proved a very angel of mercy. "I think, sir, you should first have a little refreshment," he said, and brought me a whisky-and-soda. Then, while I thawed my frozen bones before the logs, he departed to seek his master.

I was too preoccupied with my own grievances to feel much interest in the fact that I had stumbled upon the dwelling of the boy who had so intrigued me at Lady Amysfort's ball. But, as I warmed my hands at the blaze, it did occur to me that this was the last kind of house I would have linked him with—this sham-mediæval upholstered magnificence. It was Gothic with every merit of Gothic left out, and an air of dull ecclesiasticism hung about it. There was even an organ at one end, ugly and staring, as if it had come out of some *nouveau riche* provincial church. Every bit of woodwork was fretted and tortured into fancy shapes.

I heard a voice at my elbow.

"I think we have met before, Sir Edward," it said. "I am so sorry for your misfortune. Let's get the boot off and look at the ankle."

"It's only a sprain," I said. "I really don't want to bother you. If you would be so very kind as to lend me a car to take me to Lancaster, I can manage to travel all right. I ought to be in London to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense!" He smiled in a pleasant boyish way. "You are going to stay here to-night, and if you're well enough I'll send you into Lancaster to-morrow. You look simply fagged out. Let's get the boot off and see if we need a doctor."

He summoned the butler, and the two of them soon had my foot bare, while the boy, who seemed to know something about sprains, ran a light hand over the ankle bone.

"Nothing very bad here," he said; "but it must have been jolly painful to walk with. We'll bandage it and you need only limp for a day or two. Beaton, find out if Sir Edward's room is ready. You'd better have a hot bath and then we'll do the bandaging. After that you'll want some food. I'll lend you a dressing-gown and dry clothes."

The next hour was spent in restoring me to some ease of body. Severns might be an ugly house, but whoever built it had a pretty notion of comfort in bedrooms. I had two rooms, each with a cheerful fire, and when I had had my bath the two Samaritans bandaged my ankle as neatly as a hospital nurse, and helped me into a suit of flannels. Then Vernon disappeared, and when he returned he was dressed for dinner. A table had been laid for me in

the sitting-room, and Beaton was waiting to ask me what I would drink.

"Champagne," said Vernon. "I prescribe it."

"But you're making far too much fuss about me," I protested. "I can easily dine downstairs with you."

"I think you ought to dine here. You've put yourself in my hands and I'm your medical adviser."

He saw me start my meal before he left me.

"Do you mind if I say good night now?" he said. "You ought to get to bed pretty soon, and I have some work I want to do after dinner. Sound sleep and pleasant dreams."

I dined excellently, and after a single pipe was resolutely put to bed by Beaton the butler. They were benevolent despots in this house who were not to be gainsaid. I was sufficiently weary to be glad to go to sleep, but before I dropped off I wondered just a little at the nature of my reception. There were no other guests, Beaton had told me, and it seemed odd that a boy of nineteen alone in this Gothic mausoleum should show so little desire for human companionship. I should have expected, even if I were not allowed downstairs, to have had him come and talk to me for an hour or so before turning in. What work had he to which he was so faithful? I remembered that Charles had mentioned that he was a bit of a swell at his books, but, as Charles himself had been ploughed for Pass Mods, that might mean very little. Anyhow, there was something morbid about a conscience which at nineteen forced its possessor to work in vacation time after dinner.

He had been immensely hospitable, but obviously he had not wanted my company. That aloofness which I had remarked at Lady Amysfort's ball had become a heavy preoccupation. His attitude had been courteously defensive; there had been a screen which robbed his kindness of all geniality. I felt quite distinctly that there was something in or about the house, something connected with himself, from which I was being resolutely excluded.

I slept well, and was awakened by Beaton bringing my early tea. He had undrawn the curtains and opened wider one of the windows, and a great flood of sunlight and spring air was pouring through. The storm had passed and April was in her most generous mood. My ankle felt lumpish and stiff, but when Beaton examined it he pronounced that it was mending nicely. "But you can't press on it to-day, sir," he added. "Mr. Vernon won't let you move to-day. . . . Breakfast will be laid in the sitting-room, and Mr. Vernon's compliments and he proposes to join you at nine o'clock. I will return and bandage the ankle and assist you to rise as soon as Prayers are over."

Presently, as I lay watching a ridge of distant hill seen through the window and trying to decide what it could be, the sound of singing rose from some room below me. It must be Prayers. The old-fashioned hymn tune reminded me of my childhood and I wondered how many young men of to-day kept up the fashion of family worship when alone in a country house. And then I suddenly remembered all about the Milburnes, for they had been my mother's friends.

Humphrey Milburne had been a rich Lancashire cotton-spinner, whose father or grandfather—I forget which—had been one of the pioneers of the industry. I don't think he had ever concerned himself greatly with business, for his *métier* had always been that of the devout layman who is more occupied with church affairs than any bishop. He had been a leader of the Evangelical party, a vigorous opponent of ritualist practices, and a noted organiser of religious revivals. Vague memories of him came back to me from my childhood, for my own family had been of the same persuasion. I had a recollection of a tall bearded man who on a visit to us had insisted on seeing the children, and had set me on his knee, and had asked me, a shivering self-conscious mite, embarrassing questions about my soul. I remembered his wife, Lady Augusta, more clearly. She was a thin little woman who never seemed to be separated from a large squashy Bible stuffed with leaflets and secured by many elastic bands. She had had a knack of dropping everything as she moved, and I had acted as page to retrieve her belongings. She had been very kind to me, for to her grief she had then no children. . . . I remembered that a son had at last been born—"a child of many prayers," my mother had called him. And then came a vague recollection of a tragedy. Lady Augusta had died when the boy was an infant and her husband had followed within the year. After that the Milburnes passed out of my life, except that their nurse had come to us when I was at Oxford, and had had much to say of young Master Vernon.

My vague remembrance seemed to explain my host. The child of ageing parents and an orphan from his early years—that would account for his lack of youthful spontaneity. I liked the notion of him I was acquiring; there was something quaint and loyal in his keeping up the family ritual—an Evangelical athlete with the looks of Apollo. I had fancied something foreign in his air, but that of course was nonsense. He came of the most prosaic British stock, cotton-spinning Milburnes, and for his mother a Douglas-Ernott, whose family was the quintessence of Whig solidity.

I found Vernon waiting for me in the sunny sitting-room, dressed in rough grey homespun and with an air of being ready for a long day in the open. There was a change in him since the night before. His eyes were a little heavy, as if he had slept badly, but the shutters were lifted from them. His manner was no longer constrained, and the slight awkwardness I had felt in his presence was gone. He was now a cheerful communicative undergraduate.

“Beaton says you had a good night, sir, but you mustn’t use that foot of yours. You can’t think of London to-day, you know. I’ve nothing to do except look after you, so you’d better think of me as Charles with a nephew’s privileges. It’s going to be a clinking fine day, so what do you say to running up in the car to the moors above Shap and listening to the curlews? In the spring they’re the jolliest things alive.”

He was a schoolboy now, looking forward to an outing, and we might have been breakfasting in Oxford rooms before going out with the Bicester.

I fell into his holiday mood, and forgot to tell him that I had long ago met his parents. He lent me an ulster and helped me downstairs, where he packed me into the front of a big Daimler and got in beside me. In the clear spring sunshine, with the park a chessboard of green grass and melting snow, and the rooks cawing in the beech tops, Severns looked almost venerable, for its lines were good and the stone was weathering well. He nodded towards the long façades. "Ugly old thing, when you think of Levens or Sizergh, but it was my grandfather's taste and I mean to respect it. If we get a fine sunset you'll see it light up like an enchanted castle. It's something to be able to see the hills from every window, and to get a glimpse of the sea from the top floor. Goodish sport, too, for we've several miles of salmon and sea trout, and we get uncommon high birds in the upper coverts."

We sped up by winding hill-roads to the moors, and there were the curlews crying over the snow-patched bent with that note which is at once eerie and wistful and joyful. There were grouse, too, busy with their nesting, and an occasional stonechat, and dippers flashing their white waistcoats in every beck. It was like being on the roof of the world, with the high Lake hills a little fore-shortened, like ships coming over the horizon at sea. Lunch we had with us and ate on a dry bank of heather, and we had tea in a whitewashed moorland farm. I have never taken to anyone so fast as I took to that boy. He was in the highest spirits, as if he had finished some difficult task, and in the rebound he became extraordinarily companionable.

I think he took to me also, for he showed a shy but intense interest in my doings, the eagerness with which an undergraduate prospects the channels of the world's life which he is soon to navigate. I had been prepared to find a touch of innocent priggishness, but there was nothing of the kind. He seemed to have no dogmas of his own, only inquiries.

"I suppose a lawyer's training fits a man to examine all kinds of problems—not only legal ones," he asked casually at luncheon. "I mean he understands the value of any sort of evidence, for the principles of logical proof are always the same?"

"I suppose so," I replied, "though it's only legal conundrums that come my way. I was once asked my opinion on a scientific proof—in the higher mathematics—but I didn't make much of it—couldn't quite catch on to the data or understand the language."

"Yes, that might be a difficulty," he admitted. "But a thing like a ghost story for instance—you'd be all right at that, I suppose?"

The boy had clearly something in his head, and I wondered if the raw magnificence of Severns harboured any spooks. Could that be the reason of his diffidence on the previous evening?

When we got home we sat smoking by the library fire, and while I skimmed *The Times* Vernon dozed. He must have been short of his sleep and was now making up for it in the way of a healthy young man. As I watched his even breathing I decided that here there could be no abnormality of body and mind. It was like watching a tired

spaniel on the rug, too tired even to hunt in his dreams.

As I lifted my eyes from the paper I saw that he was awake and was looking at me intently, as if he were hesitating about asking me some question.

"I've been asleep," he apologised. "I can drop off anywhere after a day on the hills."

"You were rather sleepless as a child, weren't you?" I asked.

His eyes opened. "I wonder how you know that?"

"From your old nurse. I ought to have told you that in my boyhood I knew your parents a little. They stayed with us more than once. And Mrs. Ganthony came to my mother from you. I was at Oxford at the time, and I remember how she used to entertain us with stories about Severns. You must have been an infant when she left."

"I was four. What sort of things did she tell you?"

"About your bad nights and your pluck. I fancy it was by way of censure of our declamatory habits. Why, after all these years I remember some of her phrases. How did the thing go? 'What fidgeted me was the way his lordship 'eld his tongue. For usual he'd shout as lusty as a whelp, but on these mornings I'd find him with his eyes like moons and his skin white and shiny, and never a cheep the whole blessed night, with me lying next door, and a light sleeper at all times, Mrs. Wace, ma'am.' Was Mrs. Wace a sort of Mrs. Harris?"

He laughed merrily. "To think that you should have heard that! No, she was our housekeeper, and Ganthony, who babbled like Sairey Gamp,

made a litany of her name. That's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard."

"You've outgrown that childish ailment anyhow," I said.

"Yes. I have outgrown it." My practice with witnesses made me detect just a shade of hesitation.

At dinner he returned to the subject which seemed to interest him, the exact nature of the legal training. I told him that I was an advocate, not a judge, and so had no need to cultivate a judicial mind.

"But you can't do without it," he protested. "You have to advise your client and pronounce on his case before you argue it. The bulk of your work must be the weighing of evidence. I should have thought that that talent could be applied to any subject in the world if the facts were sufficiently explained. In the long run the most abstruse business will boil down to a fairly simple deduction from certain data. Your profession enables you to select the relevant data."

"That may be true in theory but I wouldn't myself rate legal talent so high. A lawyer is apt to lack imagination, you know." Then I stopped, for I had suddenly the impression that Vernon wanted advice, help of some kind—that behind all his ease he was profoundly anxious, and that a plea, almost a cry, was trembling on his lips. I detest confidences and labour to avoid them, but I could no more refuse this boy than stop my ears against a sick child. So I added, "Of course lawyers make good confidants. They're mostly decent fellows, and they're accustomed to keeping their mouths shut."

He nodded, as if I had settled some private scruple, and we fell to talking about spring salmon in the Tay.

"Take the port into the library," he told Beaton. "Sir Edward doesn't want coffee. Oh, and see that the fire is good. We shan't need you again to-night. I'll put Sir Edward to bed."

There was an odd air of purpose about him, as he gave me his arm to the library and settled me with a cigar in a long chair. Then he disappeared for a minute or two and returned with a shabby little clasped leather book. He locked the door and put the key on the mantelpiece, and when he caught me smiling, he smiled too, a little nervously.

"Please don't think me an ass," he said. "I'm going to ask a tremendous favour. I want you to listen to me while I tell you a story, something I have never told to anyone in my life before. . . . I don't think you'll laugh at me, and I've a notion you may be able to help me. It's a confounded liberty, I know, but may I go on?"

"Most certainly," I said. "I can't imagine myself laughing at anything you had to tell me; and if there's anything in me that can help you it's yours for the asking."

He drew a long breath. "You spoke of my bad nights as a child and I said I had outgrown them. Well, it isn't true."

2

When Vernon was a very little boy he was the sleepest and healthiest of mortals, but every spring he had a spell of bad dreams. He slept at that time in the big new night-nursery at the top of

the west wing, which his parents had built not long before their death. It had three windows looking out to the moorish flats which run up to the fells, and from one window, by craning your neck, you could catch a glimpse of the sea. It was all hung, too, with a Chinese paper whereon pink and green parrots squatted in wonderful blue trees, and there seemed generally to be a wood fire burning. He described the place in detail, not as it is to-day, but as he remembered it.

Vernon's recollection of his childish nightmares was hazy. They varied, I gathered, but narrowed down in the end to one type. He used to find himself in a room different from the nursery and bigger, but with the same smell of wood smoke. People came and went, such as his nurse, the butler, Simon the head keeper, Uncle Appleby his guardian, Cousin Jennifer, the old woman who sold oranges in Axby, and a host of others. Nobody hindered them from going away, and they seemed to be pleading with him to come too. There was danger in the place; something was going to happen in the big room, and if by that time he was not gone there would be mischief. . . . But it was quite clear to him that he could not go. He must stop there, with the wood smoke in his nostrils, and await the advent of the something. But he was never quite sure of the nature of the compulsion. He had a notion that if he made a rush for the door at Uncle Appleby's heels he would be allowed to escape, but that somehow he would be behaving badly. Anyhow, the place put him into a sweat of fright, and Mrs. Ganthony looked darkly at him in the morning.

Those troubled springs continued—odd interludes in a life of nearly unbroken health. Mrs. Ganthony left because she could not control her tongue and increased the boy's terrors, and Vernon was nine—he thought—before the dream began to take a really definite shape. The stage was emptying. There was nobody in the room now but himself, and he saw its details a little more clearly. It was not any apartment in Severns. Rather it seemed like one of the big old panelled chambers which he remembered from visits to the Midland country houses of his mother's family, when he had arrived after dark and had been put to sleep in a great bed in a place lit with dancing firelight. In the morning it had looked only an ordinary big room, but at that hour of the evening it had seemed an enchanted cave. The dream-room was not unlike these, for there was the scent of a wood fire and there were dancing shadows, but he could not see clearly the walls or the ceiling, and there was no bed. In one corner was a door which led to the outer world, and through this he knew that he might on no account pass. Another door faced him, and he knew that he had only to turn the handle for it to open.

But he did not want to, for he understood quite clearly what was beyond. There was a second room just like the first one ; he knew nothing about it except that opposite the entrance another door led out of it. Beyond was a third chamber, and so on interminably. There seemed to the boy to be no end to this fantastic suite. He thought of it as a great snake of masonry, winding up hill and down dale away to the fells or the sea. . . . Yes,

but there *was* an end. Somewhere far away in one of the rooms was a terror waiting on him, or, as he feared, coming towards him. Even now it might be flitting from room to room, every minute bringing its soft tread nearer to the chamber of the wood fire.

About this time of his life, the dream was an unmitigated horror. Once it came while he was ill with a childish fever, and it sent his temperature up to a point which brought Dr. Moreton galloping from Axby. In his waking hours he did not, as a rule, remember it clearly; but during the fever, asleep and awake, that sinuous building, one room thick, with each room opening from the other, was never away from his thoughts. It amazed him to think that outside were the cheerful moors where he hunted for plovers' eggs, and that only a thin wall of stone kept him from pleasant homely things. The thought used to comfort him when he was awake, but in the dream it never came near him. Asleep, the whole world seemed one suite of rooms, and he, a forlorn little prisoner, doomed grimly to wait on the slow coming through the many doors of a fear which transcended word and thought.

He became a silent, self-absorbed boy, and, though the fact of his nightmares was patent to the little household, the details remained locked up in his head. Not even to Uncle Appleby would he tell them, when that gentleman, hurriedly kind, came to visit his convalescent ward. His illness made Vernon grow, and he shot up into a lanky, leggy boy. But the hills soon tautened his sinews, and all the time at his preparatory school he was a healthy and active child. He told

me that he tried to exorcise the dream through his religion—to “lay his burden on the Lord,” as the old evangelical phrase has it; but he signally failed, though he got some comfort from the attempt. It was borne in on him, he said, that this was a burden which the Lord had laid quite definitely on him and meant him to bear like a man.

He was fifteen and at Eton when he made the great discovery. The dream had become almost a custom now. It came in April at Severns about Easter-tide—a night’s discomfort (it was now scarcely more) in the rush and glory of the holidays. There was a moment of the old wild heart-fluttering; but a boy’s fancy is more quickly dulled than a child’s, and the endless corridors were now more of a prison than a witch’s ante-chamber. By this time, with the help of his diary, he had fixed the date of the dream; it came regularly on the night of the first Monday of April. Now the year I speak of he had made a long expedition into the hills, and had stridden homeward at a steady four miles an hour among the gleams and shadows of an April twilight. He was alone at Severns, so he had had his supper in the big library, where afterwards he sat watching the leaping flames on the open stone hearth. He was very weary, and sleep fell upon him in his chair. He found himself in the wood-smoke chamber, and before him the door leading to the unknown. . . . But it was no indefinite fear that now lay beyond. He knew clearly—though how he knew he could not tell—that each year the something came a room nearer, and was even now but twelve rooms

off. In twelve years his own door would open, and then——

He woke in the small hours, chilled and mazed, but with a curious new assurance in his heart. Hitherto the nightmare had left him in gross terror, unable to endure the prospect of its recurrence, till the kindly forgetfulness of youth relieved him. But now, though his nerves were fluttering, he perceived that there was a limit to the mystery. Some day it must declare itself and fight on equal terms.

The discovery opened a new stage in his life. As he thought over the matter in the next few days he had the sense of being forewarned and prepared for some great test of courage. The notion exhilarated as much as it frightened him. Late at night, or on soft dripping days, or at any moment of lessened vitality, he would bitterly wish that he had been born an ordinary mortal. But on a keen morning of frost, when he rubbed himself warm after a cold tub, or at high noon of summer, the adventure of the dream almost pleased him. Unconsciously he must have braced himself to a harder discipline. His fitness, moral and physical, became his chief interest for reasons that would have been unintelligible to his friends or his masters.

He passed through school—as I knew from Charles—an aloof and rather splendid figure, a magnificent athlete with a brain as well as a body, a good fellow in everyone's opinion, but a grave one. He could have had no real intimates, for he never shared the secret of the spring dream. At this period, for some reason which he could not tell, he would have burned his hand off sooner than breathe a hint of it. Pure terror absolves

from all conventions and demands a confidant, so terror, I think, must have largely departed from the nightmare as he grew older. Fear, indeed, remained, and awe and disquiet, but these are human emotions, whereas terror is of hell.

Had he told anyone, he would no doubt have become self-conscious and felt acutely his difference from other people, so it was a sound instinct which kept him silent. As it was, he seems to have been an ordinary schoolboy, much liked, and, except at odd moments, unaware of any brooding destiny. As he grew older, and his ambition awoke, the moments when he remembered the dream were apt to be disagreeable, for a boy's ambitions are strictly conventional and his soul revolts at the abnormal. By the time he was ready for the university he wanted above all things to run the mile a second faster than anyone else, and he had hopes of academic distinction, for he was an excellent classic. For most of the year he lived with these hopes and was happy; then came April, and for a short season he was groping in dark places. Just before and after each dream he was in the mood of exasperation; but when it actually came he was plunged in a different atmosphere, and felt the quiver of fear and the quick thrill of expectation.

During his first year at Oxford he had made an attempt to avoid it. He and three others were on a walking tour in Brittany in gusty spring weather, and came late one evening to an inn by an estuary where sea-gulls clattered about the windows. Youth-like they made a great and foolish feast, and sat all night round a bowl of punch, while

school songs and "John Peel" contended with the dirling of the gale. At daylight they took the road again, without having closed an eye, and Vernon told himself that he was rid of his incubus. He wondered at the time why he was not more cheerful, for to his surprise he had a sense of loss, of regret, almost of disappointment.

"That was last year," he said, and he opened the little locked diary and showed me the entry. "Last night I went to bed not knowing what to think, but far more nervous than I had been since I was a baby. I hope I didn't show it, but I wasn't much in the mood for guests when you turned up."

"What happened?" I asked eagerly. "Did the dream come back?"

He nodded and passed me the diary so that I could read that morning's entry. The dream had not failed him. Once more he had been in the chamber with the wood fire; once again he had peered at the door and wondered with tremulous heart what lay beyond. For the something had come nearer by *two* rooms, and was now only seven doors away. I read the bare account in his neat, precise handwriting, and it gave me a strong impression of being permitted to peep through a curtain at a stage mysteriously set. I noticed that he had added some lines from Keats's "Indian Maid's Song":

"I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind."

There was a mark of exclamation against the "she," as if he found some irony in it.

3

He seemed to be waiting for me to speak, waiting shyly and tensely like a child expecting the judgment of an elder. But I found it hard to know what to say.

"That is a very wonderful story!" I ventured at last. "I am honoured that you should have chosen me to tell it to. Perhaps it will be a relief to you to know that some one else understands what you are going through. . . . I don't suppose you want sympathy, but I would like to congratulate you on your fortitude."

"I don't need sympathy—or congratulation. But I want help—the help of your brain and your experience. . . . You see, in seven years some tremendous experience is coming to me, and I want—I'd like—to know what it is."

"I wonder if a good doctor wouldn't be the best person to consult."

"No, no," he cried almost angrily. "I tell you there's nothing pathological about it—not now that I'm a man. I don't want it exorcised as if it were an evil spell. I think—now—that I'd break my heart if it all vanished into moonshine. . . . I believe in it as I believe in God, and I'm ready to face whatever is coming. But I want to be forewarned and forearmed, if possible, for it's going to be a big thing. If I only knew something about what was coming—even the smallest something!"

Those were the days before psycho-analysis had become fashionable, but even then we had psychologists, and in my bewilderment I tried that tack.

"Might not it all spring from some fright—some strange experience at any rate—which you had as a baby? Such things often make an abiding impression."

He smiled. "You're still thinking it is pathological. Fright would account for recurring nightmares, but surely not for a thing so rational as this—a fixed day every year, the same room, the time limit. It would not explain the thing moving on a room last year when I had no dream."

"I suppose not," I admitted. "Have you looked up your family history? I have heard stories of inherited obsessions and premonitions—what they call a 'weird' in Scotland."

"I thought of that, but there's nothing—nothing. There are no Milburne records much beyond my grandfather, and by all accounts they were the most prosaic kind of business men. My mother's family—well, there's plenty of records there and I've waded through most of the muniment room at Appleby. But there's no hint of anything mysterious in the Douglas-Ernotts. They were a time-serving lot, who knew how the cat was going to jump, but they kept out of crime and shunned anything imaginative like the plague. I shouldn't think one of them had ever an ambition which couldn't be put in terms of office or money, or a regret except that he had missed a chance of getting at the public purse. True-blue Whigs, all of them."

"Then I'm hanged if I know what to say. But, now you've told me, I want you to remember that you can always count on me. I may not be able to help, but I'm there whenever you want me."

Perhaps—you never know—the thing will reveal itself more clearly in the next seven years and come within the scope of my help. I've taken a tremendous liking to you, my dear chap, and we're going to be friends."

He held out his hand.

"That's kind of you. . . . Shall I tell you what I think myself? I was taught to believe that everything in our lives is foreordained by God. No caprice of our own can alter the eternal plan. Now, why shouldn't some inkling of this plan be given us now and then—not knowledge, but just an inkling, that we may be ready? My dream may be a heavenly warning, a divine foreshadowing—a privilege, not a cross. It is a reminder that I must be waiting with girt loins and a lit lamp when the call comes. That's the way I look on it, and it makes me happy."

I said nothing, for I did not share his Calvinism, but I felt that suddenly that library had become rather a solemn place. I had listened to the vow of the young Hannibal at the altar.

XII: THE SPRING SONG

I

I HAVE a preposterous weakness for youth, and I fancy there is something in me which makes it accept me as a coæval. It may be my profession. If you are a busy lawyer without any outside ambitions you spend your days using one bit of your mind, and the rest remains comparatively young and unstaled. I had no wife and few near

relations, and while I was daily growing narrower in my outlook on the present and the future I cherished a wealth of sentiment about the past. I welcomed anything which helped me to recapture the freshness of boyhood, and Vernon was like a spring wind in my arid life. Presently we forgot that I was nearly twice his age, and slipped into the manner of contemporaries. He was far more at his ease with me than with the men of his own year. I came to think that I was the only person in the world who *knew* him, for though he had an infinity of acquaintances and a good many people who ranked as friends I suppose I was his only comrade. For I alone knew the story of his dreams.

My flat in Down Street became his head-quarters in London, and I never knew when he would stick his head into my Temple chambers and insist on our dining or lunching together. In the following winter I went to Oxford occasionally, nominally to visit Charles; but my nephew led a much occupied life, and it generally ended by my spending my time with Vernon. I kept a horse with the Bicester that season and we hunted occasionally together, and we had sometimes a walk which filled the short winter day, and dined thereafter and talked far into the night. I was anxious to learn how his contemporaries regarded him, and I soon found that he had a prodigious reputation, which was by no means explained by his athletic record. He at once impressed and puzzled his little world. I think it was the sense of brooding power about him which attracted people and also kept them at a respectful distance. His ridiculous good looks and his gentle courtesy seemed to mark

him out for universal popularity, but there was too much austerity for a really popular man. He had odd ascetic traits. He never touched wine now, he detested loose talk, and he was a little intolerant of youthful follies. Not that there was anything of the prig in him—only that his character seemed curiously formed and mature. For all his urbanity he had a plain, almost rugged, sagacity in ordinary affairs, a tough core like steel harness under a silk coat. That, I suppose, was the Calvinism in his blood. Had he been a less brilliant figure, he would probably have been set down as “pi.”

Charles never professed to understand him, and contented himself with prophesying that “old Vernon would be the devil of a swell some day.” On inquiry I found that none of his friends forecast any special career for him; it would have seemed to them almost disrespectful to condescend upon such details. It was not what Vernon would do that fired their sluggish imaginations, but what they dimly conceived that he already was.

There was the same fastidiousness about all his ways. I have never known a better brain more narrowly limited in its range. He was a first-class “pure” scholar and had got a Craven and been *proxime* for the Hertford. But he was quite incapable of spreading himself, and his prospects looked bad for “Greats” since he seemed unable to acquire the smattering of loose philosophy demanded by that school. He was strictly circumscribed in his general reading; I set it down at first to insensitiveness, but came soon to think it fastidiousness. If he could not have exactitude and perfection in his knowledge, he preferred to

remain ignorant. I saw in him the makings of a lawyer. Law was just the subject for a finical, exact and scrupulous mind like his. Charles had once in his haste said that he was not a man of the world, and Charles had been right. He was a man of his own world, not the ordinary one. So with his intellectual interests. He would make his own culture, quite regardless of other people. I fancy that he felt that his overmastering private problem made it necessary to husband the energies of his mind.

During that year I think he was quite happy and at peace about the dream. He had now stopped hoping or fearing; the thing had simply become part of him, like his vigorous young body, his slow kindliness, his patient courage. He rarely wanted to talk of it, but it was so much in my thoughts that I conducted certain researches of my own. I began by trying the psychological line, and plagued those of my acquaintances who had any knowledge of that dismal science. I cannot say I got much assistance. You see, I had to state a hypothetical case, and was always met by a demand to produce the patient for cross-examination—a reasonable enough request, which of course I could not comply with. One man, who was full of the new Vienna doctrine, talked about “complexes” and “repressions” and suggested that the dream came from a child having been shut up by accident in a dark room. “If you can dig the memory of it out of his subconsciousness, you will lay that ghost,” he said. I tried one evening to awake Vernon’s earliest recollections, but nothing emerged. The dream itself was the furthest-back point in his recollection. In any case

I didn't see how such an explanation would account for the steady development of the thing and its periodicity. I thought I might do better with family history, and I gave up a good deal of my leisure to the Douglas-Ernotts. There was nothing to be made of the Ernotts—gross utilitarian Whigs every one of them. The Douglas strain had more mystery in it, but the records of his branch of the great Scottish house were scanty, and sadly impersonal. Douglasses many had endured imprisonment and gone to the scaffold, but history showed them as mere sounding names, linked to forays and battles and strange soubriquets, but as vague as the heroes of Homer. As for the Milburnes, I got an ancient aunt who had known Vernon's father to give me her recollections, and a friend on the Northern Circuit collected for me the Lancashire records. The first of them had been a small farmer somewhere on the Ribble; the second had become a mill-owner; and the third in the early nineteenth century had made a great fortune, had been a friend of William Wilberforce and later of Richard Cobden, and had sat in the first Reform parliament. As I looked at the portrait of that whiskered reformer, bland and venerable in his stiff linen and broadcloth, or at the early Millais of his son, the bearded Evangelical, I wondered what in them had gone to the making of Vernon. It was like seeking for the ancestry of a falcon among barnyard fowls.

2

In the spring of 1914 I badly needed a holiday, and Lamancha asked me to go cruising in his

yacht. He gave me permission to bring Vernon, whom he knew slightly, for I wanted to be near him on the first Monday of April. We were to join the yacht at Constantinople, and cruise through the Northern *Ægean* to Athens, and then by way of the Corinth canal to Corfu, where we would catch the steamer for Brindisi and so home. Vernon was at first a little disinclined, for he had a notion that he ought to be at Severns, but when he allowed himself to be persuaded he grew very keen about the trip, for he had been little out of England.

He and I travelled by the Orient Express to Constantinople, and after three days there and one day at Brousa shaped our course westward. We landed one morning on the Gallipoli peninsula, and found birds' eggs on Achi Baba, where in a year's time there was to be nothing but barbed wire and trenches. We spent a day at Lemnos, which at that time few people had visited except the British Navy, and then turned south. On the first Monday of April we had half a gale, an uncomfortable thing in those shallow seas. It blew itself out in the afternoon, and after tea we anchored for the night under the lee of a big island. There was a little bay carved out of the side of a hill ; the slopes were covered with heath and some kind of scrub, and the young green of crops showed in the clearings. Among the thyme of the nearest headland a flock of goats was browsing, shepherded by a little girl in a saffron skirt, who sang shrilly in snatches. After the yeasty *Ægean* the scene was an idyll of pastoral peace. Vernon had all day shown signs of restlessness, and

he now proposed a walk; so, leaving the others playing bridge, we two were put ashore in the dinghy.

We walked southward towards the other horn of the bay, past little closes of fruit blossom, and thickets of wildwood, and stony patches of downland bright with anemones and asphodel. It was a strange, haunted world, bathed in a twilight of gold and amethyst, filled with a thousand aromatic scents, and very silent except for the wash of the waves and a far-off bleating of goats. Neither of us wanted to talk, being content to drink in the magic of the evening. Vernon walked like a man in a dream, stopping now and then to lift his head and stare up the long scrubby ravines to the sharp line of the crest.

Suddenly a cuckoo's note broke into the stillness and echoed along the hillside. When it died away it seemed to be answered by a human voice, sweet and high and infinitely remote, a voice as fugitive as a scent or a colour.

Vernon stopped short.

"Listen to that," he cried. "It is the Spring Song. This has probably been going on here since the beginning of time. They say that nothing changes in these islands—only they call Demeter the Virgin Mary and Dionysos St. Dionysius."

He sat down on a boulder and lit his pipe. "Let's burn tobacco to the gods," he said. "It's too enchanted to hurry through. . . . I suppose it's the way I've been educated, but I could swear I've known it all before. This is the season of the Spring Festival, and you may be sure it's the same here to-day as it was a thousand years before Homer. The winter is over and the Underworld

has to be appeased, and then the Goddess will come up from the shades."

I had never heard Vernon talk like this before, and I listened with some curiosity. I am no classical scholar, but at that moment I too felt the spell of a very ancient and simple world.

"This was the beginning of the year for the Greeks, remember," he continued—"for the Greeks as we know them, and for the old Mediterranean peoples before them whose ritual they absorbed. The bones of that ritual never altered. . . . You have to begin with purification—to feed the ghosts of the dead in the pot-holes with fireless and wineless sacrifices and so placate them, and to purify your own souls and bodies and the earth by which you live. You have your purgation herbs like buckthorn and agnus castus, and you have your *pharmakos*, your scapegoat, who carries away all impurities. And then, when that is done, you are ready for the coming of the Maiden. It is like Easter after Good Friday—the festival after the fast and penitence. It is always the woman that simple folk worship—the Mother who is also the Maid. Long ago they called her Pandora or Persephone, and now they call her the Blessed Virgin, but the notion is the same—the sinless birth of the divine. You may be sure it is she whom the peasants in this island worship, as their fathers did three thousand years ago—not God the Father.

"The Greeks had only the one goddess," he went on, "though she had many names. Later they invented the Olympians—that noisy, middle-class family party—and the priests made a great

work with their male gods, Apollo and the like. But the woman came first, and the woman remained. You may call her Demeter, or Aphrodite, or Hera, but she is the same, the Virgin and the Mother, the 'mistress of wild things,' the priestess of the new birth in spring. Semele is more than Dionysos, and even to sophisticated Athens the Mailed Virgin of the Acropolis was more than all the pantheon. . . . Don't imagine it was only a pretty fancy. The thing had all the beauty of nature, and all the terror too." He flung back his head and quoted some sonorous Greek.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Euripides," he replied. "It has been well translated," and he quoted:

"For her breath is on all that hath life, and she floats in the air
Bee-like, death-like, a wonder."

"I can see it all," he cried. "The sacred basket, the honey and oil and wine, the torches crimsoning the meadows, the hushed quiet people waiting on the revelation. They are never more than a day or two from starvation all the winter, and the coming of the Maiden is a matter for them of life and death. They wait for her as devout souls to-day wait for the Easter Resurrection. I can hear the ritual chant and the thin clear music of the flutes. . . . Yes, but they were seeing things which are now hid from us—Dionysos with his thyrsus, and goat-feet in the thickets, and the shadows of dancing nymphs! If you starve for three months and put your soul into waiting for the voice from heaven you are in the mood for marvels. Terror and horror, perhaps, but unspeakable

beauty, too, and a wild hope. That was the Greek religion, not the Olympians and their burnt offerings. And it is the kind of religion that never dies."

I thought this pretty good for the scion of an Evangelical family, and I said so.

He laughed. "It isn't my own creed, you know. I dislike all kinds of priestcraft. But, though I'm a stout Protestant, I'm inclined to think sometimes that it is a pity that we have departed from the practice of all other religions and left out the Mother of God. . . . Let's go on—I want to see what is on the other side of the cape."

Beyond the little headland we came suddenly on a very different scene. Here was the harbour of the island. Beside a rude quay some fisher-boats lay at anchor with their brown sails furled. Along the water-front ran a paved terrace, a little dilapidated and with bushes growing in the cracks of the stones. Above rose a great building, showing to seaward as a blank white wall pierced with a few narrow windows. At first sight I took it for a monastery, but a second glance convinced me that its purpose had never been religious. It looked as if it had once been fortified, and the causeway between it and the sea may have mounted guns. Most of it was clearly very old, but the architecture was a jumble, showing here the enriched Gothic of Venice and there the straight lines and round arches of the East. It had once, I conjectured, been the hold of some Venetian sea-king, then the palace of a Turkish conqueror, and was now, perhaps, the manor-house of this pleasant domain. The owners, whoever they might be, were absent, for not a chimney smoked.

We passed the quay and wandered along the great terrace, which was as solidly masoned as a Roman road. For a little the house hung sheer above us, its walls level with the rock, with in three places flights of steps from the causeway ending in small postern doors. Obviously the main entrance was on the other side. There were no huts to be seen, and no sign of life except a little group of fishermen below on the shore, who were sitting round a fire over which a pot was boiling. As we continued along the terrace beyond the house we came to orchards and olive yards, no doubt part of the demesne, and had a glimpse of a rugged coast running out into the sunset.

The place impressed even my sluggish fancy. This great silent castle in the wilds, hung between sky and earth, and all rosy in the last fires of the sun, seemed insubstantial as a dream. I should not have been surprised if it had vanished like a mirage and left us staring at a bare hillside. Only the solid blocks of the causeway bound us to reality. Here, beyond doubt, men had lived and fought far back in the ages. The impression left on my mind was of a place inhabited for æons, sunk for the moment in sleep, but liable to awake suddenly to a fierce life. As for Vernon he seemed positively rapt.

"There's your castle in Spain," he cried. "Odd thing! but I seem to have seen all this before. I knew before we turned the corner that there were olive trees there, and that the rocks tumbled just in that way into the cove. Listen!"

The sound of voices drifted up from the beach, and there was a snatch of a song.

“That’s Antiphilos of Byzantium—you remember in the *Anthology*—the fisher-boys singing round the broth-pot. Lord! what a haunted spot! I’d like to spend the night here.”

I can give no reason for it, but I suddenly felt a strange uneasiness, which made me turn back and stride at a good pace along the terrace. We seemed to have blundered outside the ordinary natural world. I had a feverish desire to get away from the shadow of that pile of masonry, to get beyond the headland and in sight of the yacht. The place was wonderful, secret, beautiful, yet somehow menacing. Vernon clearly felt nothing of all this, for he grumbled at my haste. “Hang it, we’re not walking for a wager,” he complained. “There’s loads of time before dinner. . . . I want to stay on here a bit. I never saw such a place.”

At the beginning of the paved terrace close to the quay we came suddenly upon two men, probably from the fishermen’s party we had seen on the shore. They were well-set-up fellows, with handsome clear-cut faces, for the true Greek strain is still found in the islands. We came on them by surprise as we turned the corner of a rock, and they may have thought from our direction that we were coming from the house. Anyhow they seemed to get the fright of their lives. Both leaped aside and looked at us with startled angry eyes. Then they flung up their right hands; and for a moment I thought they were going to attack us.

But they contented themselves with spitting on their breasts and each holding out a clenched fist

with the little finger and the thumb extended. I had seen this before—the ancient protection against the evil eye. But what impressed me was the expression in their faces. It was at Vernon that they stared, and when their stare moved from him it took in the pile of the house above. They seemed to connect us in some way with the house, and in their eyes there was an almost animal fear and hate. . . . I looked after them when they had passed, and observed that they were hurrying with bent heads up the path which may have led to their village.

Vernon laughed. "Queer chaps! They looked as scared as if they had seen Pan."

"I don't like this place," I told him when we were approaching the dinghy. "Some of your infernal gods and goddesses have got loose in it. I feel as if I want to run."

"Hullo!" he cried. "You're getting as impressionable as a minor poet. . . . Hark! There it is again! Do you hear? The Spring Song?"

But the thin notes which drifted down from the upland no longer seemed to me innocent. There was something horrible about that music.

Next morning, when we were steaming south in calm weather with the island already dim behind us, I found Vernon smoking peacefully on deck and looking at sea-birds through a glass. He nodded gaily as I sat down beside him.

"I had the dream all right—one room nearer. But the room in which I wait has changed. It must be due to being out here, for hitherto I've always spent April in England. I suppose I

furnished it unconsciously with things I had seen at home—there was a big lacquer cabinet for one thing, and something like pictures or tapestry on the walls—and there were great silver fire dogs. But now it's quite bare. The same room of course—I couldn't mistake it—but scarcely any furniture in it except a dark lump in a corner. . . . Only the fire-dogs are the same. . . . Looks as if the decks were being cleared for action."

I had expected to find him a little heavy about the eyes, but he appeared as fresh as if he had just come from a morning swim, and his voice had a boyish carelessness.

"Do you know," he said, "I've lost every scrap of funk or nervousness about the dream? It's a privilege, not an incubus. Six years to wait! I wish I knew how I was going to put them in. It will be a dull business waiting."

3

Fate contrived that to Vernon, as to several million others, the next four years should scarcely deserve the name of dull. By the middle of August I was being cursed by a Guards sergeant in Chelsea barrack yard, and Vernon was training with his Yeomanry somewhere in Yorkshire.

My path was plain compared to that of many honest men. I was a bachelor without ties, and though I was beyond the statutory limit for service I was always pretty hard trained, and it was easy enough to get over the age difficulty. I had sufficient standing in my profession to enable me to take risks. But I am bound to say I never thought of that side. I wanted, like everybody

else, to do something for England, and I wanted to do something violent. For me to stay at home and serve in some legal job would have been a thousand times harder than to go into the trenches. Like everybody else, too, I thought the war would be short, and my chief anxiety was lest I should miss the chance of fighting. I was to learn patience and perspective during four beastly years.

I went to France in October '14, and Vernon dined with me before I started. He had got a curious notion into his head. He thought that the war would last for full six years, and his reason was that he was convinced that his dream had to do with it. The opening of the last door would be on the battlefield—of that he was convinced. The consequence was that he was in no hurry. My nephew Charles, who was in the same Yeomanry, spent his days pleading to be sent abroad and trying to exchange into any unit he thought would get away first. On the few occasions I met him he raved like a lunatic about the imbecility of a Government that kept him kicking his heels in England. But Vernon, the night he dined with me, was as placid as Buddha. "I'm learning my job," he said, "and I've a mighty lot to learn. I ought to be a fair soldier in six years' time—just when the crisis is due." But he was very anxious about me, and wanted to get into the Guards to be beside me. Only his fatalism kept him from agitating for a change, for he felt that, as he had begun in the Yeomanry, Providence most likely meant him to continue there. He fussed a good deal about how we were to correspond, for I seemed to

have taken the place of his family. But on the whole I was happy about him, his purpose was so clear and his mind so perfectly balanced. I had stopped thinking seriously about the dream, for it seemed only a whimsy in the middle of so many urgent realities.

I needn't tell you the kind of time I had in France. It was a long dismal grind, but I had the inestimable advantage of good health, and I was never a day off duty because of sickness. I suppose I enjoyed it in a sense ; anyhow I got tremendously keen about my new profession, and rose in it far quicker than I deserved. I was lucky, too. As you know, I stopped something in every big scrap—at Festubert, Loos, Ginchy, Third Ypres, Cambrai and Bapaume—so that I might have covered my sleeve with wound-stripes if I had been so minded. But none of the damage was serious and I can hardly find the marks of it to-day. I think my worst trial was that for more than three years I never had a sight of Vernon.

He went out in the summer of '15 to the Dardanelles and was in the Yeomanry fight at Suvla, where a bit of shrapnel made rather a mess of his left shoulder. After that he was employed on various staff jobs, and during '16 was engaged in some kind of secret service in the Ægean and the Levant. I heard from him regularly, but of course he never spoke of his work. He told me he had learned modern Greek and could speak it like a native, and I fancy he had a hand in Venizelos's revolution. Then he went back to his regiment, and was in the "Broken Spurs" division when the Yeomanry were dismounted. He was

wounded again in Palestine in '17, just before the taking of Jerusalem, and after that was second in command of a battalion.

When I was on leave in February '18 Charles dined with me at the Club—a much older and wiser Charles, with an empty sleeve pinned to his tunic, who was now employed in home training.

"It's a bloody and disgusting war," said my nephew, "and if any fellow says he likes it, you can tell him from me that he's a liar. There's only one man I ever met who honestly didn't mind it, and that was old Vernon, and everybody knows that he's cracked."

He expatiated on the exact nature of Vernon's lunacy.

"Cracked—as—cracked, and a very useful kind of insanity, too. I often wished I had half his complaint. He simply didn't give a hang for the old war. Wasn't interested in it, if you see what I mean. Oh, brave as you-be-damned, of course, but plenty of other chaps were brave. His was the most cold-blooded, unearthly kind of courage. I've seen the same thing in men who were sick of life and wanted to be killed and knew they were going to be killed, but Vernon wasn't that sort. He had no notion of being killed—always planning out the future and talking of what he was going to do after the war. As you know, he got badly mauled at Suvla, and he nearly croaked with malaria in Crete, and he had his head chipped at Neby Samwil, so he didn't bear what you might call a charmed life. But some little bird had whispered in his ear that he wasn't going to be killed, and he believed that bird. You never saw a fellow

in your life so much at his ease in a nasty place.

"It wasn't that he was a fire-eater," Charles went on. "He never went out to look for trouble. It was simply that it made no difference to him where he was or what he was doing—he was the same composed old fish, smiling away, and keeping quiet and attending to business, as if he thought the whole thing rather foolishness."

"You describe a pretty high class of soldier," I said. "I can't understand why he hasn't gone quicker up the ladder."

"I can," said Charles emphatically. "He was a first-class battalion officer but he wasn't a first-class soldier. The trouble with him, as I say, is that he wasn't interested in the war. He had no initiative, you understand—always seemed to be thinking about something else. It's like Rugby football. A man may be a fine player according to the rules, but unless his heart is in the business and he can think out new tactics for himself he won't be a great player. Vernon wasn't out to do anything more than the immediate situation required. You might say he wasn't dead-set enough on winning the war."

I detected in Charles a new shrewdness. "How did the others get on with him?" I asked.

"The men believed in him and would have followed him into hell, and of course we all respected him. But I can't say he was exactly popular. Too dashed inhuman for that. He ought to fall in love with a chorus-girl and go a regular mucker. Oh, of course, I like him tremendously and know what a rare good fellow he is. But the ordinary simple-minded, deserving

lad jibs at Sir Galahad crossed with the low-church parson and the 'Varsity don."

The Broken Spurs came to France in the early summer of '18, but I had no chance of meeting them. My life was rather feverish during the last weeks of the campaign, for I was chief staff-officer to my division, and we were never much out of the line. Then, as you know, I nearly came by my end in September, when the Boche made quite a good effort in the way of a gas attack. It was a new gas, which we didn't understand, and I faded away like the grin of the Cheshire cat, and was pretty ill for a time in a base hospital. Luckily it didn't do me any permanent harm, but my complexion will be greenery-yallery till the day of my death.

I awoke to consciousness in a tidy little bed to learn that the war was all but over and the Boche hustling to make peace. It took me some days to get my head clear and take notice, and then one morning, I observed the man in the bed next to me. His head was a mass of bandages, but there was something about the features that showed which struck me as familiar. As luck would have it, it turned out to be Vernon. He had been badly hit, when commanding his battalion at the crossing of the Scheldt, and for a day or two had been in grave danger. He was recovering all right, but for a time neither of us was permitted to talk, and we used to lie and smile at each other and think of all the stories we would presently tell.

It was just after we got the news of the Armistice that we were allowed to say how d'ye do.

We were as weak as kittens, but I, at any rate, felt extraordinarily happy. We had both come through the war without serious damage and a new world lay before us. To have Vernon beside me put the coping-stone on my contentment, and I could see that he felt the same. I remember the thrill I had when we could stretch out our arms and shake hands.

Slowly we began to build up each other's records for the four years. I soon knew, what I had guessed before, the reason of that inhuman composure which Charles had described. Vernon had had a complete assurance that his day of fate was not due yet awhile, and therefore the war had taken a second place in his thoughts. Most men who fought bore the marks of it in harder lines about the mouth and chin and older eyes. But Vernon had kept his youth intact. His face had always had a certain maturity beyond his years, and his eyes had been curiously watchful. These traits were perhaps slightly intensified, but otherwise I noticed no difference.

"You remember what I told you when we last met in October '14?" he said. "I was wrong and I'm rather sorry. I thought the war would last for six years and that the last stage of my dream would be in the field. That would have been such a simple and right solution. As it is, I must wait."

I asked if the dream had come regularly in the past four years.

"Quite regularly," was the answer. "The room hasn't changed either, except that the dark shadow in the corner has moved, so I think it must be a human figure. The place is quite bare and empty

now, except for the silver fire-dogs. . . . I think there is a little window in the wall, rather high up."

"You have only two years more to wait," I said, "less—a year and a half." It was then November '18.

"I know. . . . But I am impatient again. I thought the climax would come in the war, so I stopped speculating about it. . . . I thought I would be called on as a soldier to do something very difficult, and I was quite ready. . . . But that has all gone, and I am back in the fog. I must think it all out again from the beginning."

XIII: FOLLIOT'S TALE

THE immediate consequence of peace was to keep Vernon and myself apart. You see, we neither of us got better very quickly. When his wounds were healed a kind of neuritis remained; he was tortured with headaches, didn't sleep well, and couldn't recover his lost weight. He was very patient and cheerful about it, and did obediently what he was told, for his one object seemed to be to get fit again. We returned to England together, but presently the doctors packed him off abroad with instructions to bask in the sun and idle at a Riviera villa which had been dedicated to such cases. So I spent a lonely Christmas in London.

Heaven knows I had nothing to complain of compared with most fellows, but I count the six months after the Armistice the most beastly in my life. I had never been seriously ill before, all the four years of war I had been brimming over with energy, and it was a new experience for

me to feel slack and under-engined. The gas had left a sort of poison in my blood which made every movement an effort. I was always sleepy, and yet couldn't sleep, and to my horror I found myself getting jumpy and neurotic. The creak of a cart in the street worried me so that I wanted to cry; London noise was a nightmare, and when I tried the country I had a like horror of its silence. The thing was purely physical, for I found I could think quite clearly and sanely. I seemed to be two persons, one self-possessed enough watching the antics of the other with disgust and yet powerless to stop them.

Acton Croke was reassuring. "You're a sick man, and you've got to behave as such," he told me. "No attempt to get back into harness. Behave as if you were recovering from a severe operation—regular life, no overstrain physical or mental, simply lie fallow and let nature do its work. You have a superb constitution which, given a chance, will pick up its balance. But don't forget that you're passing through a crisis. If you play the fool you may have indifferent health for the rest of your days."

I was determined that at all events that mustn't happen, so I was as docile as a good child. As I say, I had mighty little to complain of, when you consider the number of good men who, far seedier than I, came back to struggle for their daily bread. I had made a bit of money, so I had a solid hump to live off. There was a dearth at the time of leaders at the Bar, and I could have stepped at once into a bigger practice than I had ever dreamed of. Also, I had a chance, if I

wished, of becoming again one of the Law Officers of the Crown. I was still a member of Parliament, and at the December election, though I had never gone near the place, my old constituency had returned me with a majority of more than ten thousand. A pretty gilded position for a demobbed soldier! But for the present I had to put all that aside and think only of getting well.

There has been a good deal of nonsense talked about the horror of war memories and the passionate desire to bury them. The vocal people were apt to be damaged sensitives, who were scarcely typical of the average man. There were horrors enough, God knows, but in most people's recollections these were overlaid by the fierce interest and excitement, even by the comedy of it. At any rate that was the case with most of my friends, and it was certainly the case with me. I found a positive pleasure in recalling the incidents of the past four years. The war had made me younger. You see—apart from regular officers—I had met few of my own year and standing. I had consorted chiefly with youth, and had recovered the standpoint of twenty years ago. That was what made my feeble body so offensive. I could not regard myself as a man in middle age, but as a sick undergraduate whose malady was likely to keep him out of the Boat or the Eleven.

You would have laughed if you could have seen the way I spent my time. I was so angry with my ill health that I liked to keep on reminding myself of the days when I had been at the top of my form. I remember I made out a complete record of my mountaineering exploits, working

them out with diagrams from maps and old diaries, and telling myself furiously that what I had once done I could do again. . . . I got out my old Oxford texts and used to construe bits of the classics, trying to recapture the mood when those things meant a lot to me. . . . I read again all the books which used to be favourites but which I hadn't opened for a score of years. I turned up the cram books for the Bar exams, and the notes I had taken in my early days in chambers and the reports of my first cases. It wasn't sentiment, but a deliberate attempt to put back the clock, and, by recalling the feelings of twenty-five, to convince myself that I had once been a strong man. . . . I even made risky experiments. I went up to Oxford in vacation and managed to get put up in my old diggings in the High. That would have been intolerable if they had recalled war tragedies, but they didn't. The men who had shared them with me were all alive—one a Colonial bishop, one a stockbroker, another high up in the Indian Civil Service. It did me good to see the big shabby sitting-room where, in my day, a barrel of beer had adorned one corner. In March, too, I spent three nights at a moorland inn on the Borders which had once been the head-quarters of a famous reading-party. That was not quite so successful, for the weather and the food were vile, and I was driven to reflect on the difference of outlook between twenty and forty-three.

Still my childishness did me good, and I began slowly to gain ground. The spring helped me, which was early that year, you remember, so that the blossom had begun on the fruit trees in the

first days of April. I found that it was the time just before the war that it comforted me most to recall, for then I had been healthy enough and a creature more near my present state than the undergraduate of twenty. I think, too, it was because those years were associated with Vernon. He was never much out of my mind, and the reports from him were cheering. The headaches had gone, he had recovered his power of sleep, and was slowly putting on weight. He had taken to sailing a small boat again, had bought a racing cutter, and had come in third in one of the events at the Cannes Regatta.

I had this last news in a letter which reached me while I was staying at Minster Carteron, and it turned my mind back to the yachting trip I had made with Vernon in 1914 in the *Ægean*. It revived the picture I had almost forgotten—the green island flushed with spring, the twilight haunted with wild music, the great white house hanging like a cliff over the sea. I had felt the place sinister—I remembered the two men with scared faces and their charm against the evil eye—and even after five years a faint aura of distaste lingered about the memory. That was sufficient to awake my interest, and one afternoon I rummaged in the library. Plakos had been the island's name, and I searched for it in gazetteers.

It was the day of the famous April snowstorm which wrought such havoc among English orchards. The windows of the great room were blurred with falling snow, and the fires on the two hearths were hissing and spluttering while I pursued my researches. Folliot, I remember, was dozing beside

one of them in an arm-chair. You know old Folliot, with his mild cattish ways and his neat little Louis Napoleon beard. He wants to be the Horace Walpole of our time, and publishes every few years a book of reminiscences, from which it would appear that he has been the confidant of every great man in Europe for the last half-century. He has not much of a mind, but he has a good memory, and after all there is a faint interest about anybody who has dined out in good company for fifty years.

I woke the old fellow when I dropped by misadventure a big atlas on the floor, and he asked testily what I was after.

"I'm trying to find a beastly Greek islet," I said. "You haven't by any chance in your travels visited a place called Plakos?"

The name roused him. "No," he said, "but of course I have often heard of it. It belonged to Shelley Arabin."

"Now, who on earth was Shelley Arabin?"

"You young men!" old Folliot sighed. "Your memories are so short and your ignorance so vast. Shelley Arabin died last year, and had half a column in *The Times*, but he will have a chapter in my memoirs. He was one of the most remarkable men of his day. Shelley Arabin—to think you never heard of him! Why, I knew his father."

I drew up an arm-chair to the hearth opposite him. "It's a foul afternoon," I said, "and there's nothing to do. I want to hear about Shelley Arabin. I take it from his name that he was a Levantine."

Folliot was flattered by my interest. He had

begun to bore people, for the war had created a mood unfavourable to his antique gossip. He still stayed a good deal in country houses, but spent most of his time in the libraries and got rather snubbed when he started on his reminiscences.

"Bless you, no! A most ancient English house—the Arabins of Irtling in Essex. Gone out for good now, I fear. As a boy I remember old Tom Arabin—a shaggy old bandit, who came to London once in five years and insulted everybody and then went back again. He used to dine with my family, and I remember watching him arrive, for I had a boyish romance about the man, who had been a friend of Byron. Yes, he was with Byron when he died at Missolonghi, and he was an intimate of all the poets of that time—Byron, Shelley—he called his son after Shelley—Keats too, I think—there's a mention of him in the *Letters* I'm almost sure—and he lived with Landor in Italy till they quarrelled. A most picturesque figure, but too *farouche* for comfort. With him a word was a blow, you understand. He married—now, who did he marry?—one of the Manorwaters, I fancy. Anyhow, he led her the devil of a life. He bought or stole or acquired somehow the island of Plakos, and used it as a base from which to descend periodically upon the civilised world. Not a pleasant old gentleman, but amazingly decorative. You may have seen his translation of Pindar. I have heard Jebb say that it was a marvellous piece of scholarship, but that his English style was the exact opposite of everything that Pindar stood for. Dear me! How short the world's memory is!"

"I want to hear about his son," I said.

"You shall—you shall! Poor Shelley, I fear he had not the kind of upbringing which is commonly recommended for youth. Tom disliked his son, and left him to the care of the family priest—they were Catholics of course. All his boyhood he spent in that island among the peasants and the kind of raffish company that his father invited to the house. What kind of company? Well, I should say all the varieties of humbug that Europe produces—soldiers of fortune and bad poets and the gentry who have made their native countries too hot for them. Plakos was the refuge of every brand of outlaw, social and political. Ultimately the boy was packed off to Cambridge, where he arrived speaking English a generation out of date and with the tastes of a Turkish pasha, but with the most beautiful manners. Tom, when he wasn't in a passion, had the graciousness of a king, and Shelley was a young prince in air and feature. He was terribly good-looking in a way no man has a right to be, and that prejudiced him in the eyes of his young contemporaries. Also there were other things against him."

"How long did Cambridge put up with him?" I asked.

"One year. There was a scandal—rather a bad one, I fancy—and he left under the blackest kind of cloud. Tom would not have him at home, but he gave him a good allowance, and the boy set up in London. Not in the best society, you understand, but he had a huge success in the half-world. Women raved about him, and, even when his reputation was at its worst, he would be seen at a few good houses. . . . I suppose a lawyer does

not concern himself with poetry, but I can assure you that Shelley Arabin made quite a name for himself in the late eighties. I believe bibliophiles still collect his first editions. There was his epic on the Fall of Jerusalem—a very remarkable performance as a travesty of history. And there were his love sonnets, beautiful languid things quite phosphorescent with decay. He carried Swinburne and Baudelaire a stage further. Well, that mood has gone from the world and Shelley Arabin's reputation with it, but at one time sober critics felt obliged to praise him even when they detested him. He was a red-hot revolutionary, too, and used to write pamphlets blackguarding British policy. . . . I saw quite a lot of him in those days, and I confess that I found him fascinating. Partly it was his beauty and his air, partly that he was like nobody I had ever met. He could talk wonderfully in his bitter, high-coloured way. But I never liked him. Oh no, I never liked him. There was always a subtle cruelty about him. Old Tom had been a blackguard, but he had had a heart—Shelley behind all his brilliance was ice and stone. I think most people came to feel this, and he had certainly outstayed his welcome before he left London."

"What made him leave?"

"His father's death. Tom went out suddenly from old age just before the war between Greece and Turkey. Shelley left England with a great gasconade of Greek patriotism—he was going to be a second Byron and smite the infidel. By all accounts he did very little. I doubt if he had old Tom's swashbuckling courage: indeed I have

heard ugly stories of the white feather. . . . Anyhow England knew him no more. He married a girl he met in Rome—Scotch—a Miss Hamilton, I think, but I never knew of what Hamiltons. He treated her shamefully after the Arabin tradition. She did not live long, and there were no children, I believe, and now Shelley is dead and the Arabins are extinct. Not a pleasant family, you will say, and small loss to the world. But there was a certain quality, too, which under happier circumstances might have made them great. And assuredly they had looks. There was something almost unholy about Shelley's beauty in his early days. It made men instinctively dislike him. If I had had a son I should have liked him to be snub-nosed and bullet-headed, for ugliness in the male is a security for virtue and a passport to popularity."

This was probably a sentence from one of Folliot's silly books of reminiscences. My curiosity about Plakos was not exhausted and I asked what kind of life had been lived there. "The house is a tremendous affair," I said, "with room for a regiment."

"I know," said Folliot, "and it was often full. I had always a great curiosity to go there, though I dare say I should have found the atmosphere too tropical for my taste. Shelley never invited me, but if I had arrived he could scarcely have turned me away. I entertained the notion at one time, but I kept putting it off till my taste for that kind of adventure declined. . . . No, I have never been nearer Plakos than Athens, where I once spent a fortnight when Fanshawe was our Minister there.

I asked about Shelley, of course, and Fanshawe gave me an ugly report. Plakos, you must know, is a remote and not over-civilised island where the writ of the Greek Government scarcely runs, so it was very much a patriarchal despotism. I gathered that Shelley was not a popular landlord. There had been many complaints, and one or two really horrid stories of his treatment of the peasantry. It seemed that he saw a good deal of company, and had made his house a resort for the rascality of Europe. The rascality—not merely the folly, as in his father's time. The place fairly stank in Fanshawe's nostrils. 'The swine still calls himself an Englishman,' he told me, 'still keeps his English domicile, so we get the blame of his beastliness. And all the while, too, he is sluicing out venom about England. He is clever enough to keep just inside the tinpot Greek law. I'd give a thousand pounds to see him clapped in gaol.'"

I had heard all I wanted to know, and picked up a book, while Folliot busied himself with the newspaper. A little later he interrupted me.

"I have just remembered something else. You knew Wintergreen, the archæologist? He was at the British School in Athens, and then excavated Hittite remains in Asia Minor. Poor fellow, he died of dysentery as an intelligence officer in Mesopotamia. Well, Wintergreen once spoke to me of Plakos. I suppose he had been there, for he had been everywhere. We were talking, I remember, one night in the club about Gilles de Rais—the French Bluebeard, you know, the friend of Joan of Arc—and I asked if anything approaching that kind of miscreant still existed

on the globe. Somebody said that the type was fairly common in the East, and mentioned some Indian potentate. Wintergreen broke in. 'You don't need to go to the East,' he said. 'You can find it in Europe,' and he started to speak of Shelley Arabin. I don't recollect what exactly he said, but it was pretty bad, and of course strictly libellous. By his account Shelley had become a connoisseur and high-priest of the uttermost evil, and the cup of his iniquities was nearly full. It seemed that Wintergreen had been in the island excavating some ancient remains and living among the peasants, and had heard tales that sickened him. He thought that some day soon the great house would go flaming to heaven, set alight by an outraged people.

"Well, it hasn't happened." Folliot returned to his *Times*. "Shelley has died in his bed, which is perhaps more than he deserved. Not agreeable people, I fear. It is a good thing that he left no posterity."

That evening I thought a good deal about Plakos. I was glad to have discovered the reason for the aversion which I had felt on our visit, and was inclined to believe that I must be a more sensitive person than my friends would admit. After that the subject passed from my mind.

By the end of April I was so much recovered that I went back to my practice at the Bar, and was almost snowed under by the briefs which descended on my shoulders as soon as there was a rumour of my return. It would have been a difficult job to select, and I dare say I should have slipped into overwork, had I not been made a

Law Officer. That, so to speak, canalised my duties, and since my task was largely novel and, at the moment, of extraordinary interest, the change completed my convalescence. In May I was my normal self, and when Vernon returned to England in June he found me eating, sleeping and working as in the old days—a fitter man, indeed, than in 1914, for the war seemed to have drawn off the grosser humours of middle life.

Vernon, too, was fit again. If a young man starts with a fine constitution and a strong character and applies all the powers of his mind to the task of getting well, he is almost certain to succeed. He came back to London a lean, sunburnt creature, with an extraordinarily *rarefied* look about him. He had lost nothing of his youth, indeed he scarcely looked his twenty-five years ; but he had been fined down and tautened and tested, so that his face had a new spirituality in it as if there was a light shining behind. I have noticed the same thing in other cases of head wounds. You remember how Jim Barraclough, who used to be a heavy red-haired fellow, came out of hospital looking like a saint in an Italian primitive.

Vernon was changed in other ways. You see, he belonged to a generation which was nearly cleaned out by the war, and he had scarcely a friend of his own year left except my nephew Charles. That should not have meant so much to him as to other people, for he had never depended greatly on friends, but I think the thought of all the boys who had been at school and college with him lying under the sod gave him a feeling of desperate loneliness, and flung him back more than ever on himself.

I could see that even I meant less to him than before, though I still meant a good deal.

I was partly to blame for that, perhaps. The war had altered everybody's sense of values, and unconsciously I had come to take his dream less seriously. I had got into a mood of accepting things as they came and living with short horizons, and the long perspective which dominated his thoughts seemed to me a little out of the picture. I was conscious of this change in myself, and strove not to show it, but he must have felt it, and the blinds came down ever so little between us. For it was clear that the dream meant more than ever to him. He was in the last lap now, had rounded the turn and was coming up the straight, and every nerve and sinew was on the stretch. I couldn't quite live up to this ardour, though I tried hard, and with that lightning instinct of his he was aware of it, and was sparing of his confidences. The thing made me miserable, for it increased his loneliness, and I longed for the next year to be over and the apocalyptic to be driven out of his life. The mere fact that I took for granted that nothing would happen showed that I had lost my serious interest in his dream. Vernon had to outgrow a childish fancy, as one outgrows a liability to chicken-pox—that was all.

He had become harder too, as a consequence of loneliness. You remember that curious summer of 1919 when everybody was feverishly trying to forget the war. They were crazy days, when nobody was quite himself. Politicians talked and writers wrote clotted nonsense, statesmen chased their tails, the working-man wanted to double

his wages and halve his working hours at a time when the world was bankrupt, youth tried to make up for the four years of natural pleasure of which it had been cheated, and there was a general loosening of screws and a rise in temperature. It was what I had looked for, and I sympathised with a good deal of it, but, Lord bless me! Vernon was like an Israelitish prophet at a feast of Baal. I recalled what Charles had said about him in the war, and I wondered if Charles had not been right. Vernon seemed destitute of common humour.

I took him to dine at the Thursday Club, which had just been started. There he behaved well enough, for he found people who could talk his own language. But I noticed how complete was his apathy when politics were the subject of conversation. He was as uninterested in the setting to rights of the world as a hermit in a cell. He was oddly uncompanionable, too. Burminster's rollicking chaff got nothing out of him but a Monna Lisa smile. "What has happened to the boy?" that worthy asked me afterwards. "Shell-shock or what? Has he left a bit of his mind out in France? He's the most buttoned-up thing I ever struck."

He was worse with the ordinary young man. I gave a dinner or two for him, and, as we had one club in common, we occasionally found ourselves together in smoking-room gatherings. I had an immense pity for youth struggling to adjust its poise, and often I could have found it in my heart to be annoyed with Vernon's uncanny balance, which was not far from egotism. These poor lads were splashing about in life, trying to find

their feet, and for their innocent efforts he had only a calm contempt. He sat like a skeleton at the feast, when they chattered about their sporting and amorous ventures and discussed with abysmal ignorance how money was to be made in a highly expensive world. I have a vivid recollection of his courteous insulting aloofness.

"What rot to say that the war has done any good," he remarked to me once as we walked back to the flat. "It has killed off the men, and left only the half-wits."

Charles, now endeavouring without much success to earn a living in the City, was vehement on the subject, and he had a characteristic explanation. "Vernon has become a wonderful old fossil," he said. "Not gone to seed, like some of the rest, but a fossil—dried up—mummified. It isn't healthy, and I'm pretty certain about the cause. He's got something on his mind, and I shouldn't be surprised if he was preparing to come an everlasting cropper. I think it's a girl."

It certainly was not a girl. I often wished it had been, for to a fellow as lonely as Vernon the best cure, as I saw it, would have been to fall in love. People had taken furiously to dancing, and that summer, though there were no big balls, every dinner party seemed to end in a dance, and every restaurant was full of rag-time music and ugly transatlantic shuffling. For youth it was a good way of working off restlessness, and foolish middle age followed the guiding of youth. I had no fault to find with the fashion. The poor girls, starved for four years of their rights, came from dull war-work and shadowed schoolrooms determined to

win back something. One could forgive a good deal of shrillness and bad form in such a case. My one regret was that they made such guys of themselves. Well-born young women seemed to have taken for their models the cretinous little oddities of the film world.

One night Vernon and I had been dining at the house of a cousin of mine and had stayed long enough to see the beginning of the dance that followed. As I looked on, I had a sharp impression of the change which five years had brought. This was not, like a pre-war ball, part of the ceremonial of an assured and orderly world. These people were dancing as savages danced—to get rid of or to engender excitement. Apollo had been ousted by Dionysos. The nigger in the band who came forward now and then and sang some gibberish was the true master of ceremonies. I said as much to Vernon, and he nodded. He was watching with a curious intensity the faces that passed us.

"Everybody is leaner," I said, "and lighter on their feet. That's why they want to dance. But the women have lost their looks."

"The women!" he murmured. "Look at that, I beseech you!"

It was a tall girl, who was dancing with a handsome young Jew, and dancing, as I thought, with a notable grace. She was very slim and clearly very young, and I dare say would have been pretty, if she had let herself alone. I caught a glimpse of fine eyes, and her head was set on her neck like a flower on its stalk. But some imp had inspired her to desecrate the gifts of the Almighty. Her hair was bobbed, she had too much paint and

powder on her face, she had some kind of barbaric jewels in her ears which put her head out of drawing, and she wore a preposterous white dress. Don't ask me to describe it, for I am not an expert in millinery ; but it seemed to me wrong by every canon of decency and art. It had been made, no doubt, with the intention of being provocative, and its audacious lines certainly revealed a great deal of its wearer's body. But the impression was rather of an outrage perpetrated on something beautiful, a foolish ill-bred joke. There was an absurd innocence about the raddled and half-clad girl—like a child who for an escapade has slipped down to the drawing-room in her nightgown.

Vernon did not feel as I felt. His eyes followed her for a little, and then he turned to me with a face like stone.

"So much for our righteous war," he said grimly. "It's to produce *that* that so many good fellows died."

XIV: INTRODUCES MISS ARABIN

EARLY in November I went down to Wirlesdon for the first big covert shoot. I am not a great performer with the gun, and you will not find me often in the first flight in the hunting-field, but, busy as I was, I made time now for an occasional day's shooting or hunting, for I had fallen in love with the English country, and it is sport that takes you close to the heart of it. Is there anything in the world like the corner of a great pasture hemmed in with smoky-brown woods in an autumn twilight : or the jogging home after a good

run when the moist air is quickening to frost and the wet ruts are lemon-coloured in the sunset ; or a morning in November when, on some upland, the wind tosses the driven partridges like leaves over tall hedges, through the gaps of which the steel-blue horizons shine ? It is the English winter that intoxicates me more even than the English May, for the noble bones of the land are bare, and you get the essential savour of earth and wood and water.

It was a mild evening as we walked back from the last stand to the house, and, though so late in the year, there was still a show in the garden borders. I like the rather languid scent of autumn flowers when it is chastened by a touch of wood smoke from the gardeners' bonfires ; it wakes so many memories and sets me thinking. This time my thoughts were chiefly of Vernon, whom I had not seen for several months. We were certainly drawing apart, and I didn't see how it could be avoided. I was back in the ordinary world again, with a mighty zest for it, and he was vowed and consecrated to his extraordinary obsession. I could not take it seriously myself, but about one thing I was grave enough—its effect on Vernon. Nothing would happen when next April came—of that I was convinced, but if nothing happened what would Vernon do ? The linch-pin would be out of his life. At twenty-six with a war behind him a man should have found his groove in life, but at twenty-six Vernon would be derelict, like one who has trained himself laboriously for an occupation which is gone. I put aside the notion that anything could happen, for in my new mood

I was incredulous of miracles. But my scepticism did not dispel my anxiety.

The hall at Wirlesdon is a big comfortable stone-flagged Georgian place, and before one of the fireplaces, with two great Coromandel screens for a shelter, there was the usual encampment for tea. It was a jolly sight—the autumn dusk in the tall windows, the blazing logs and the group of fresh-coloured young faces. I had gone straight to the covert-side that morning, so I had still to greet my hostess, and I was not clear who were staying in the house. Mollie Nantley, busied in making tea, muttered some indistinct introductions, and I bowed to several unfamiliar young women in riding-habits who were consuming poached eggs. I remembered that this was the Saturday country for the Mivern, and presently one of the red backs turned towards me, and I saw that it was Vernon.

The Mivern cut-away became him uncommonly well, and his splashed breeches and muddy boots corrected the over-precision which was apt to be the fault of his appearance. Once he would have made a bee-line towards me, but now he contented himself with a smile and a wave of his hand. We were certainly drifting apart. . . . He was talking to one of the Nantley girls, a pretty shy creature, just out of the schoolroom, and Tom Nantley, her father, made a third in the conversation. As I drank my tea I looked round the little gathering. There were Bill Marcus and Heneage Wotton and young Cheviot who had been of the shooting party. Lady Altrincham was there with her wonderful pearls—she is one of those people whose skin nourishes pearls and she is believed to

take them to bed with her. Young Mrs. Lamington, who had been walking with the guns, was kicking the burning logs with her mannish shoes and discussing politics with the son of the house, Hugo Brune, who was in Parliament. There were several girls, all with clear skins and shorn curls and slim straight figures. I found myself for the first time approving the new fashion in clothes. These children looked alert and vital like pleasant boys, and I have always preferred Artemis to Aphrodite.

But there was one girl who caught and held my eyes. She had been hunting, and her flat-brimmed hat was set deep on her small head and rather tilted back, for her bobbed hair gave it no support. Her figure in a well-cut coat and habit was graceful and workmanlike, and there was a rakish elegance about her pose, as she stood with one foot on the stone curb of the hearth, holding a tea-cup as a Wise Virgin may have carried a lamp. But there was little of the Wise Virgin about her face. Any colour the weather might have whipped into it had disappeared under a recent powdering, and my impression was of very red lips against a dead white background. She had been talking over her left shoulder to her hostess, and now her eyes were roaming about the place, with a kind of arrogant nonchalance. They met mine, and I saw that they were curiously sullen and masterful. Then they passed from me, for a middle-aged lawyer did not interest them, dwelt for a moment on Cheviot and Wotton, who were having an argument about woodcock, and finally rested on Vernon. She had the air of being bored with her company.

Vernon, talking idly to Tom Nantley, suddenly found himself addressed.

"Your mare wants practice in jumping stone walls," she said. "You'll cut her knees to ribbons. Better try her in caps next time."

You can cut into a conversation gracefully, and you can cut in rudely. This girl did it rudely. I could see Vernon's face harden as he replied that this bit of the Mivern country was strange to him.

"It's the only decent going in the shire. I'm sick of the rotten pastures in the vale country. What on earth does one hunt for except for pace?"

"Some of us hunt to follow hounds," was Vernon's curt rejoinder.

She laughed—a rather ugly hard little laugh. "Follow your grandmother! If hounds are all you care about you may as well go beagling! Give me a cigarette, will you?"

"Sorry. I haven't any," he replied.

Several men proffered cases. "You'll find heaps, Corrie dear," Mollie Nantley said, "in the box behind you." The girl reached behind her for the box and offered it to Vernon. When he declined she demanded a match, and Vernon, with an ill grace, lit her cigarette. It was plain that he detested her manners.

So most certainly did I. The little incident I had witnessed was oddly ill-bred and brazen. And yet "brazen" was not quite the word, for it implies self-consciousness. This masterful girl had no shadow of doubt as to her behaviour. She seemed to claim the right to domineer, like a barbaric princess accustomed to an obsequious court. Yes, "barbaric" was the right epithet.

Mollie had called her "Corrie" and the name fitted her. No doubt she had been baptized Cora or Corisande, names which for me recalled the spangles and sawdust of a circus.

She had decided that Vernon was the most interesting of the lot of us, and she promptly annexed him, moving to his side and swinging on an arm of a tapestry chair. But Vernon was a hard fellow to drive against his will. His air was a frigid courtesy, and presently he went up to his hostess. "We must be off, Lady Nantley," he said, "for it's getting dark and we are eight miles from home." He collected two of the men and three of the hunting girls, like a chaperon at a ball, shook hands with Mollie and Tom, nodded to me, and marched to the door.

The girl, who was apparently my fellow-guest, followed him with her eyes, and her scarlet lips seemed to twitch in a flicker of amusement. If she had been rude, so had been Vernon, and, had she known it, it was something of a triumph to have cracked his adamant good manners. When the party had gone, she strolled to the front of the hearth, stretched her arms above her head, and yawned.

"Lord, how stiff I am!" she proclaimed. "Heigho for a bath! I hope you've the right kind of bath salts, Mollie, or I'll be on crutches to-morrow. Come and talk to me, Dolly!" She picked up her crop, made a noose with the lash around the waist of one of the daughters of the house and drew her with her. The child, to my surprise, went smilingly.

I, too, had a bath, and read papers till it was

time to dress. I felt happier about Vernon, for the sight of his unmistakable ill-temper seemed to bring him into the common human category. I had never seen him show dislike so markedly to any human being as to that atrocious girl, and I considered that it would be a good thing if his Olympian calm could be ruffled more often in the same way. I wondered casually who she could be, and why the Nantleys should have her to stay. Probably she was some daughter of profiteers who had bought her way into an unfamiliar world, though that would not explain her presence at Wirlesdon. But an ill-bred young woman did not interest me enough for my thoughts to dwell long on her, and my only prayer was that I might not be placed next her at dinner.

It was a very young party which I found assembled in Mollie's sitting-room, and a hasty glance convinced me that I would be sent in with Mrs. Lamington. Old Folliot was there, and presently he sidled up to me to tell me a new piece of gossip. Having been out all day in strong air I was ravenous, and impatient for the announcement of dinner.

"Now, who are we waiting for?" Tom Nantley fussed around. "Oh, Corrie, of course. Corrie is always late. Confound that girl, she has probably gone to sleep in her bath. Pam, you go and dig her out. . . . Hullo, here she comes at last!"

In her hunting-kit she had looked handsome in an outlandish way, but as she swept down—without any apology—on our hungry mob there was no question of her beauty. For one thing she walked superbly. Few women can walk, and

the trouble about the new fashion in clothes is that it emphasises ugly movement. She wore a gown of a shade of green which would have ruined most people's looks, but she managed to carry it off, and something more. For a young girl she was far too heavily made up, but that too she forced one to accept. I suddenly had a new view of her, and realised that there was quality here, a masterfulness which might charm, an arrogance which perhaps was not *blasé* but virginal.

I realised, too, that I had seen her before. This was the girl whom Vernon and I had watched at my cousin's dance in July. I wondered if he had understood this in their encounter at the tea-table.

I had barely recovered from this surprise, when I had another. Folliot's hand was on my arm and he was purring in my ear:

"We talked once of Shelley Arabin, and I told you he left no children. My memory betrayed me, for that young lady is his daughter. She has the true Arabin eyes and all their unfathomable conceit. She is what in my day we would have called 'shocking bad form.' Rather common, I think."

From which I knew that she must have dealt hardly with old Folliot.

At dinner I sat between Mollie and Mrs. Lamington, and since my hostess had the garrulous Cheviot on her right hand, I devoted myself to my other neighbour. That charming lady, who gives to political intrigue what time she can spare from horseflesh, had so much to tell me that I had no need to exert myself. She was eloquent on the immense importance of certain pending Imperial appointments, especially on the need of selecting

men with the right kind of wives, the inference being that George Lamington's obvious deficiencies might be atoned for by the merits of his lady. I must have assented to everything that she said, for she told Mollie afterwards that the war had improved me enormously and had broadened my mind. But as a matter of fact I was thinking of Miss Arabin.

She sat nearly opposite to me, and I could watch her without staring. Her manner seemed to alternate between an almost hoydenish vivacity and complete abstraction. At one moment she would have her young neighbours laughing and protesting volubly, and then she would be apparently deaf to what they said, so that they either talked across her or turned to their other partners. . . . In these latter moods her eyes seemed almost sightless, so wholly were they lacking in focus or expression. Sometimes they rested on the table flowers, sometimes on the wall before her, sometime on Mrs. Lamington and myself—but they were always unseeing. Instead of their former sullenness, they seemed to have a brooding innocence. . . . I noticed, too, the quality of her voice when she spoke. It was singularly arresting—clear, high and vital. She talked the usual staccato slang, but though she rarely finished a sentence grammatically, the cadence and intonation were always rounded off to a satisfying close. Only her laugh was ugly, as if it were a forced thing. Every other sound that came from her had a musical completeness.

She had the foreign trick of smoking before the close of dinner, and, as if to preserve her beautiful

fingers from contamination, before lighting a cigarette she would draw on to her right hand a silk glove of the same colour as her gown. The Nantleys seemed to be accustomed to this habit, but it at last withdrew Mrs. Lamington from her Imperial propaganda.

"What an extraordinary young woman!" she whispered to me. "Who is she? Is she a little mad, or only foreign?"

I paraphrased old Folliot in my reply: "Pure English, but lives abroad."

The green glove somehow recalled that April evening at Plakos. This outlandish creature was interesting, for God knew what strange things were in her upbringing and her ancestry. Folliot was an old fool; she might be odious, but she was assuredly not "common." As it chanced the end of dinner found her in one of her fits of absent-mindedness, and she trailed out of the room with the other women like a sleep-walker. The two youngsters who had been her companions at table stared after her till the door closed.

Later in the drawing-room I returned to my first impression. The girl was detestable. I would have liked a sleepy evening of bridge, but the young harpy turned the sober halls of Wirlesdon into a cabaret. She behaved like a man-eating shark, and swept every male, except Tom Nantley, Folliot and myself, into her retinue. They danced in the library, because of its polished empty floor, and when I looked in I saw that the kind of dances were not what I should have chosen for youth, and was glad that Pam and Dolly had been sent to bed. I heard a clear voice declaring that it

was "devilish slow" and I knew to whom the voice belonged. At the door I passed old Folliot on his way to his room, and he shook his head and murmured "Common." This time I almost agreed with him.

In the drawing-room I found my hostess skimming the weekly Press and drew up a chair beside her. Mollie Nantley and I count cousinship, though the relation is slightly more remote, and she has long been my very good friend. She laid down her paper and prepared to talk.

"I was so glad to see Colonel Milburne again. He looks so well too. But, Ned dear, you ought to get him to go about more, for he's really a little old-maidish. He was scared to death by Corrie Arabin."

"Well, isn't she rather—shall we say disconcerting? More by token, who is she?"

"Poor little Corrie! She's the only child of a rather horrible man who died last year—Shelley Arabin. Did you never hear of him? He married a sort of cousin of mine and treated her shamefully. Corrie had the most miserable upbringing—somewhere in Greece, you know, and in Rome and Paris, and at the worst kind of girls' school where they teach the children to be snobs and powder their noses and go to confession. The school wouldn't have mattered, for the Arabins are Romans, and Corrie couldn't be a snob if she tried, but her home life would have ruined St. Theresa. She was in London last summer with the Ertzbergers, and I was rather unhappy about her living among cosmopolitan Jew *rastaquouères*, so I am trying to do what I can for her this winter. Fortunately she has taken madly to hunting and she goes most

beautifully. She has never had a chance, poor child. You must be kind to her, Ned."

I said that I was not in the habit of being brutal to young women, but that she was not likely to want my kindness. "She seems to be a success in her way. These boys follow her like sheep."

"Oh, she has had one kind of success, but not the best kind. She casts an extraordinary spell over young men, and does not care a straw for one of them. I might be nervous about Hugo, but I'm not in the least, for she is utterly sexless—more like a wild boy. It is no good trying to improve her manners, for she is quite unconscious of them. I don't think there is an atom of harm in her, and she has delightful things about her—she is charming to Pam and Dolly, and they adore her, and she is simply the most honest creature every born. She must get that from her mother, for Shelley was an infamous liar."

Mollie's comely face, with her glorious golden-red hair slightly greying at the temples, had a look of compassionate motherliness. With all her vagueness, she is one of the shrewdest women of my acquaintance, and I have a deep respect for her judgment. If she let her adored Pam and Dolly make friends of Miss Arabin, Miss Arabin must be something more than the cabaret girl of my first impression.

"But I'm not happy about her," Mollie went on. "I can't see her future. She ought to marry, and the odds are terribly against her marrying the right man. Boys flock after her, but the really nice men—like Colonel Milburne—fly from her like the plague. They don't understand that her

bad form is not our bad form, but simply foreignness. . . . And she's so terribly strong-minded. I know that she hates everything connected with her early life, and yet she insists on going back to that Greek place. Her father left her quite well off, I believe—Tom says so and he has looked into her affairs—and she ought to settle down here and acclimatise herself. All her superficial oddities would soon drop off, for she is so clever she could make herself whatever she wanted. It is what she wants, too, for she loves England and English ways. But there is a touch of daftness about her, a kind of freakishness which I can never understand. I suppose it is the Arabin blood."

Mollie sighed.

"I try to be tolerant about youth," she added, "but I sometimes long to box its ears. Besides, there is the difficulty about the others. I am quite sure of Corrie up to a point, but I can't be responsible for the young men. George Cheviot shows every inclination to make a fool of himself about her, and what am I to say to his mother? Really, having Corrie in the house is like domesticating a destroying angel."

"You're the kindest of women," I said, "but I think you've taken on a job too hard for you. You can't mix oil and wine. You'll never fit Miss Arabin into your world. She belongs to a different one."

"I wonder what it is?"

"A few hours ago I should have said it was the world of cabarets and Riviera hotels and Ertzbergers. After what you have told me I'm not so sure. But anyhow it's not our world."

As I went to bed I heard the jigging of dance music from the library, and even in so large a house as Wirlesdon its echoes seemed to pursue me as I dropped into sleep. The result was that I had remarkable dreams, in which Miss Arabin, dressed in the spangles of a circus performer and riding a piebald horse, insisted on my piloting her with the Mivern, while the Master and Vernon looked on in stony disapproval.

The next morning was frosty and clear, and I came down to breakfast to find my hostess alone in the dining-room.

"Corrie behaved disgracefully last night," I was informed. "She started some silly rag with George Cheviot and made hay of Mr. Marcus's bedroom. Tom had to get up and read the Riot Act in the small hours. I have been to her room and found her asleep, but as soon as she wakes I am going to talk to her very seriously. It is more than bad manners, it is an offence against hospitality."

I went to church with Tom and his daughters, and when we returned we found Miss Arabin breakfasting before the hall fire on grapes and coffee, with the usual young men in attendance. If she had been given a lecture by her hostess, there was no sign of it in her face. She looked amazingly brilliant—all in brown, with a jumper of brown arabesque and long amber ear-rings. A russet silk glove clothed the hand in which she held her cigarette.

Vernon came over to luncheon and sat next to Mollie, while at the other end of the table I was placed between Miss Arabin and Lady Altrincham. The girl scarcely threw a word to me, being

occupied in discussing quite intelligently with Hugo Brune the international position of Turkey. I could not avoid overhearing some of their talk, and I realised that when she chose she could behave like a civilised being. It might be that Mollie's morning discourse had borne fruit. Her voice was delightful to listen to, with its full clear tones and delicate modulations. And then, after her habit, her attention wandered, and Hugo's platitudes fell on unheeding ears. She was staring at a picture of a Jacobean Nantley on the wall, and presently her eyes moved up the table and rested on Vernon.

She spoke to me at last.

"Who is the man next to Mollie—the man who came to tea last night? You know him, don't you?"

I told her his name.

"A soldier?" she asked.

"Has been. Does nothing at present. He has a place in Westmorland."

"You are friends?"

"The closest." There was something about the girl's brusqueness which made me want to answer in monosyllables. Then she suddenly took my breath away.

"He is unhappy," she said. "He looks as if he had lost his way."

She turned to Hugo, and, with an urbanity which I had thought impossible, apologised for her inattention and took up the conversation at the point at which she had dropped it.

Her words made me keep my eyes on Vernon. Unhappy! There was little sign of it in his lean

smiling face, with the tanned cheeks and steady eyes. Mollie was clearly delighted with him; perhaps her maternal heart had marked him down for Dolly. Lost his way? On the contrary he seemed at complete ease with the world. Was this strange girl a sorceress to discover what was hidden deep in only two men's minds? I had a sense that Vernon and Miss Arabin, with nothing on earth in common, had yet a certain affinity. Each had a strain of romance in them—romance and the unpredictable.

Vernon had motored over to Wirlesdon and proposed to walk back, so I accompanied him for part of the road. I was glad of a chance for a talk, for I was miserably conscious that we were slipping away from each other. I didn't see how I could help it, for I was immersed in practical affairs, while he would persist in living for a dream. Before the war I had been half under the spell of that dream, but four years' campaigning had given me a distaste for the fantastic and set my feet very solidly on the rock of facts. Our two circles of comprehension, which used to intersect, had now become self-contained.

I asked him what he was doing with himself, and he said hunting and shooting and dabbling in books. He was writing something—I think about primitive Greek religion, in consequence of some notions he had picked up during his service in the *Ægean*.

"Seriously, old fellow," I said, "isn't it time you settled down to business? You are twenty-five, you have first-class brains, and you are quite fit now. I can't have you turning into a *flâneur*."

"There is no fear of that," he replied rather coldly. "I am eager for work, but I haven't found it yet. My training isn't finished. I must wait till after next April."

"But what is going to happen after that?"

"I don't know. I must see what happens *then*."

"Vernon," I cried, "we are old friends and I am going to speak bluntly. You really must face up to facts. What is going to happen next April? What *can* happen? Put it at its highest. You may pass through some strange mental experience. I can't conceive what it may be, but suppose the last door does open and you see something strange and beautiful or even terrible—I don't know what. It will all happen inside your mind. It will round off the recurring experiences you have had from childhood, but it can't do anything more."

"It will do much more," he said. "It will be the crisis of my life. . . . Why have you become so sceptical, Ned? You used to think as I do about it."

"It will only be a crisis if you make it so, and it's too risky. Supposing on the other hand that nothing happens. You will have keyed your whole being up to an expectation which fails. You will be derelict, cut clean from your moorings. It's too risky, I tell you."

He shook his head. "We have fallen out of understanding each other. Your second alternative is impossible. I know it in my bones. Something will happen—must happen—and then I shall know what I have to do with my life. It will be the pistol-shot for the start."

"But, my dear old man, think of the hazard.

You are staking everything on a wild chance. Heaven knows, I'm not unsympathetic. I believe in you—I believe in a way in the reality of the dream. But life is a prosaic thing, and if you are to have marvels in it you should take them in your stride. I want to see you with some sort of policy for the future, and letting the last stage of your dream drop in naturally into a strategic plan. You can't at twenty-six sit waiting on a revelation. You must shape your own course, and take the revelation when it comes. If you don't, you'll find yourself derelict. Damn it, you're far too good to be a waif."

He smiled a little sadly. "We're pretty far apart now, I'm afraid. Can't you see that the thing is too big a part of me to be treated as a side-show? It's what I've been sent into the world for. I'm waiting for my marching orders."

"Then you're waiting for a miracle," I said testily.

"True. I am waiting for a miracle," he replied. "We needn't argue about it, Ned, for miracles are outside argument. In less than six months I will know. Till then I am content to live by faith."

After leaving him, I walked back to the house in an uncomfortable frame of mind. I realised that the affection between us was as deep as ever, but I had a guilty sense of having left him in the lurch. He was alone now, whereas once I had been with him, and I hated to think of his loneliness.

As I crossed the bridge between the lakes I met Miss Arabin sauntering bareheaded in the autumn sunlight. I would have passed on, with a curt greeting, for I was in no mood to talk trivialities

to a girl I disliked, but to my surprise she stopped and turned with me up the long grassy aisle which led to the gardens.

"I came out to meet you," she said. "I want to talk to you."

My response cannot have been encouraging, but she took no notice of that.

"You're a lawyer, aren't you?" she went on. "Mollie says you are very clever. You look clever."

I dare say I grinned. I was being comprehensively patronised.

"Well, I want you to help me. I have some tiresome legal complications to disentangle, and my solicitor is a sheep. I mean to sack him."

I explained the etiquette of my profession.

"Oh, then you can tell him what to do. You'll understand his silly talk, which I don't. You make him obey you."

"My dear young lady," I said, "I cannot undertake private business. You see I'm in the employ of the Government."

"Don't be afraid, I can pay you all right." The words were too naïve to be insulting.

I said nothing, and she darted before me and looked me in the face.

"You mean that you won't help me?" she asked.

"I mean that I'm not allowed," I replied.

Without another word she swung round and disappeared up a side glade. As she vanished among the beech-trees, a figure as russet as the drift of leaves, I thought I had never seen anything more quick and slender, and I fervently hoped that I should never see her again.

XV: INTRODUCES PLAKOS

IN that hope I was mistaken. A fortnight later the Treasury Solicitor sent me the papers in one of those intricate international cases which were the debris of the war. It was a claim by a resident abroad, who had not lost his British nationality, for compensation for some oppressive act of one of the transient Greek Governments. I left the thing to my "devil," and just skimmed his note before the necessary conference with the plaintiff's solicitors. To my surprise I saw that it had to do with the island of Plakos and the name of Arabin.

Mr. Mower, of the reputable firm of Mower & Lidderdale, was not unlike a sheep in appearance—a Leicester ewe for choice. He had a large pale high-boned face, rimless spectacles, a crop of nice fleecy white hair, and the bedside manner of the good family solicitor. My hasty study of the papers showed me that the oppressive acts were not denied, but that the title of the plaintiff was questioned.

"This is a matter of domestic law," I said—"the *lex loci rei sitæ*. If the title to the land is disputed, it is a case for the Greek courts."

"We have reason to believe that the defence is not seriously put forward, for the title is beyond dispute, and we are at a loss to understand the attitude of the Greek Government. The documents are all in our possession, and we took Mr. Blakeney's advice on them. His opinion is among the papers left with you—and you will see that he has no doubt on the matter."

Mr. Blakeney certainly had not, as I saw from his opinion, nor had my "devil." The latter characterised the defence as "monstrous." It seemed to be based on an arbitrary act of the old Greek National Assembly of 1830. My note said that the title was complete in every respect, and that the attempt to question it seemed to be a species of insanity. A name caught my attention.

"What is Koré?" I asked.

"It is Miss Arabin's Christian name. Greek, I presume," said Mr. Mower, very much in the tone in which Mr. Pecksniff observed, "Pagan, I regret to say."

I read the note again, and Blakeney's opinion. Blakeney was an authority from whom I was not disposed to differ, and the facts seemed too patent for argument. As I turned over the papers I saw the name of another solicitor on them.

"You have not always acted for the Arabin family?" I asked.

"Only within the last few months. Derwents were the family solicitors, but Miss Arabin was dissatisfied with them and withdrew her business. Curiously enough, they advised that the claim of the Greek Government was good, and should not be opposed."

"What!" I exclaimed. Derwents are one of the best firms in England, and the senior partner, Sebastian Derwent, was my oldest client. He was not only a sound lawyer, but a good scholar and a good fellow. What on earth had induced him to give such paradoxical advice?

I told Mr. Mower that the matter seemed plain

enough, but that for my own satisfaction I proposed to give further consideration to the papers. I took them home with me that evening, and the more I studied them the less I could understand Derwent's action. The thing seemed a bluff so impudent as to be beyond argument. The abstract of title was explicit enough, and Blakeney, who had had the original documents, was emphatic on the point. But the firm of Derwents was not in the habit of acting without good cause. . . . I found myself becoming interested in the affair. Plakos was still a disquieting memory, and the outrageous girl at Wirlesdon was of a piece with its strangeness.

A day or two later I was dining at the Athenæum before going down to the House, and I saw Sebastian Derwent eating a solitary meal at an adjacent table. I moved over beside him, and after some casual conversation I ventured to sound him on the subject. With another man it might have been a delicate task, but we were old and confidential friends.

I told him I had had the Plakos case before me. "You used to act for the Arabins?" I said.

He nodded, and a slight embarrassment entered his manner. "My father and grandfather too before me. The firm had a difficult time with old Tom Arabin. He had a habit of coming down to the office with a horsewhip, and on one occasion my grandfather was compelled to wrest it from him, break it over his knee and pitch it into the fire."

"I can imagine easier clients. But I am puzzled about that preposterous Greek claim. I can't think how it came to be raised, for it is sheer bluff."

He reddened a little and crumbled his bread.

"I advised Miss Arabin not to dispute it," he said.

"I know, and I can't imagine why. You advised her to sit down under a piece of infamous extortion."

"I advised her to settle it."

"But how can you settle a dispute when all the rights are on one side? Do you maintain that there was any law or equity in the Greek case?"

He hesitated for a second. "No," he said, "the claim was bad in law. But its acceptance would have had certain advantages for Miss Arabin."

I suppose I looked dumbfounded. "It's a long story," he said, "and I'm not sure that I have the right to tell it to you."

"Let us leave it at that, then. Of course it's no business of mine." I did not want to embarrass an old friend.

But he seemed disinclined to leave it. "You think I have acted unprofessionally?" he ventured.

"God forbid! I know you too well, and I don't want to poke my nose into private affairs."

"I can tell you this much. Miss Arabin is in a position of extreme difficulty. She is alone in the world, without a near relation. She is very young and not quite the person to manage a troublesome estate."

"But surely that is no reason why she should surrender her patrimony to a bogus demand?"

"It would not have been exactly surrender. I advised her not to submit but to settle. Full compensation would have been paid if she had given up Plakos."

"Oh, come now," I cried. "Who ever heard of voluntary compensation being paid by a little stony-broke Government in Eastern Europe?"

"It would have been arranged," he said. "Miss Arabin had friends—a friend—who had great influence. The compensation was privately settled and it was on a generous scale. Miss Arabin has fortunately other sources of income than Plakos: indeed I do not think she draws any serious revenue from the island. She would have received a sum of money in payment, the interest on which would have added substantially to her income."

"But I still don't see the motive. If the lady is not worried about money, why should her friends be so anxious to increase her income?"

Mr. Derwent shook his head. "Money is not the motive. The fact is that Plakos is a troublesome property. The Arabin family have never been popular, and the inhabitants are turbulent and barely civilised. The thing is weighing on her mind. It is not the sort of possession for a young girl."

"I see. In order to rid Miss Arabin of a *damnosa hæreditas* you entered into a friendly conspiracy. I gather that she saw through it."

He nodded. "She is very quick-witted, and was furious at the questioning of her title. That was my mistake. I underrated her intelligence. I should have had the thing more ingeniously framed. I can assure you that my last interview with her was very painful. I was forced to admit the thinness of the Greek claim, and after that I had a taste of Tom Arabin's temper. She is an extraordinary child, but there is wonderful quality

in her, wonderful courage. I confess I am thankful as a lawyer to be rid of her affairs, but as a friend of the family I cannot help being anxious. . . . She is so terribly alone in the world."

"That is a queer story," I said. "Of course you behaved as I should have expected, but I fancy that paternal kindness is thrown away on that young woman. I met her a few weeks ago in a country house, and she struck me as peculiarly able to look after herself. One last question. Who is the friend who is so all-powerful at Athens?"

"That I fear I am not at liberty to tell you," was the answer.

This tale whetted my curiosity. From old Folliot I had learned something of the record of the Arabins, and I had my own impression of Plakos as clear as a cameo. Now I had further details in my picture. Koré Arabin (odd name! I remembered from my distant schooldays that Koré was Greek for a "maiden"—it had nothing to do with Corisande of the circus) was the mistress of that sinister island and that brooding house, of a people who detested her race. There was danger in the place, danger so great that some friend unknown was prepared to pay a large price to get her out of it, and had involved in the plot the most decorous solicitor in England. Who was this friend? I wanted to meet him and to hear more of Plakos, for I realised that he and not Derwent was the authority.

Speculation as to his identity occupied a good deal of my leisure, till suddenly I remembered what Lady Nantley had told me. Miss Arabin had been living in London with the Ertzbergers

before she came to Wirlesdon. The friend could only be Theodore Ertzberger. He had endless Greek connections, was one of the chief supporters of Venizelos, and it was through his house that the new Greek loan was to be issued. I had met him, of course, and my recollection was of a small bright-eyed man with a peaked grey beard and the self-contained manner of the high financier. I had liked him and found nothing of the *rastaquouère* in him to which Mollie objected. His wife was another matter. She was a large flamboyant Belgian Jewess, a determined social climber and a great patron of art and music, who ran a salon and whose portraits were to be found in every exhibition of the young school of painters. It was borne in on me that my curiosity would not be satisfied till I had had a talk with Ertzberger.

Lady Amysfort arranged the meeting at a Sunday luncheon when Madame Ertzberger was mercifully stricken with influenza.

Except for the hostess, it was a man's party, and afterwards she manœuvred that Ertzberger and I should be left alone in a corner of the big drawing-room.

I did not waste time beating about the bush, for I judged from his face that this man would appreciate plain dealing. There was something simple and fine about his small regular features and the steady regard of his dark eyes.

"I am glad to have this chance of a talk with you," I said. "I have lately been consulted about Plakos and Miss Arabin's claim against the Greek Government. Also a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Arabin. The whole

business interests me strongly—not as a lawyer but as a human being. You see, just before the war I happened to visit Plakos and I can't quite get the place out of my head. You are a friend of hers, and I should like to know something more about the island. I gather that it's not the most comfortable kind of estate."

He looked me straight in the face. "I think you know Mr. Sebastian Derwent," he said.

"I do. And he gave me a hint of Miss Arabin's difficulties and the solution proposed. His conduct may not have been strictly professional, but it was extraordinarily kind. But let me make it quite clear that he never mentioned your name, or gave me any sort of clue to it. I guessed that you were the friend, because I knew that Miss Arabin had been staying in your house."

"You guessed rightly. It is not a thing that I naturally want made public, but I am not in the least ashamed of the part I played. I welcome the opportunity of discussing it with you. It is a curious thing, but Miss Arabin has already spoken of you to me."

"She asked me to advise her, and I'm afraid was rather annoyed when I told her that I couldn't take private practice."

"But she has not given up the notion. She never gives up any notion. She has somehow acquired a strong belief in your wisdom."

"I am obliged to her, but I am not in a position to help."

He laid his hand on my arm. "Do not refuse her," he said earnestly. "Believe me, no woman ever stood in more desperate need of friends."

His seriousness impressed me. "She has a loyal one in you, at any rate. And she seems to be popular and to have a retinue of young men."

He looked at me sharply. "You think she is a light-headed girl, devoted to pleasure—rather second-rate pleasure—a little ill-bred, perhaps. But you are wrong, Sir Edward. Here in England she is a butterfly—dancing till all hours, a madcap in town and in the hunting-field, a bewitcher of foolish boys. Oh, bad form I grant you—the worst of bad form. But that is because she comes here for an anodyne. She is feverishly gay because she is trying to forget—trying not to remember that there is tragedy waiting behind her."

"Where?" I asked.

"In the island of Plakos."

Tragedy—that was the word he used. It had an incongruous sound to me, sitting in a warm London drawing-room after an excellent luncheon, with the sound of chatter and light laughter coming from the group around my hostess. But he had meant it—his grave voice and burdened face showed it—and the four walls seemed to fade into another picture—a twilight by a spring sea, and under a shadowy house two men with uplifted hands and hate and fear in their eyes.

"If you will do me the honour to listen," Ertzberger was speaking, "I should like to tell you more about Miss Arabin's case."

"Have you known her long?" I asked. A sudden disinclination had come over me to go further in this affair. I felt dimly that if I became the recipient of confidences I might find myself involved in some distasteful course of action.

" Since she was a child. I had dealings with her father—business dealings—he was no friend of mine—but there was a time when I often visited Plakos. I can claim that I have known Miss Arabin for nearly fifteen years."

" Her father was a bit of a blackguard ? "


" None of the words we use glibly to describe evil are quite adequate to Shelley Arabin. The man was rotten to the very core. His father—I remember him too—was unscrupulous and violent, but he had a heart. And he had a kind of burning courage. Shelley was as hard and cold as a stone, and he was also a coward. But he had genius—a genius for wickedness. He was beyond all comparison the worst man I have ever known."

" What did he do ? " I asked. " I should have thought the opportunities for wrong-doing in a remote island were limited."

" He was a student of evil. He had excellent brains and much learning and he devoted it all to researches in devilry. He had his friends—people of his own tastes who acknowledged him as their master. Some of the gatherings at Plakos would have made Nero vomit. Men and women both. . . . The place stank of corruption. I have only heard the orgies hinted at—heathenish remnants from the backstairs of the Middle Ages. And on the fringes of that hell the poor child grew up."

" Unsmirched ? "

" Unsmirched ! I will stake my soul on that. A Muse, a Grace, a nymph among satyrs. Her innocence kept her from understanding. And then as she grew older and began to have an inkling of horrors she was in flaming revolt. . . . I



managed to get her sent away, first to school, then to my wife's charge. Otherwise I think there would have been a tragedy."

"But surely with her father's death the danger is gone."

He shook his head. "Plakos is a strange place, for the tides of civilisation and progress seem to have left it high and dry. It is a relic of old days, full of wild beliefs and pagan habits. That was why Shelley could work his will with it. He did not confine his evil-doing to his friends and the four walls of his house. He laid a spell of terror on the island. There are horrid tales—I won't trouble you with them—about his dealings with the peasants, for he revelled in corrupting youth. And terror grew soon into hate, till in his last days the man's nerve broke. He lived his last months in gibbering fear. There is something to be said after all for mediæval methods. Shelley was the kind of scoundrel whom an outraged people should have treated with boiling oil."

"Does the hatred pursue his daughter?" I asked.

"Most certainly. It took years for Plakos to recognise Shelley's enormities, and now the realisation has become cumulative, growing with every month. I have had inquiries made—it is easy for me since I have agents everywhere in the Ægean—and I can tell you the thing has become a mania. The war brought the island pretty near starvation, for the fishing was crippled and a succession of bad seasons spoiled the wretched crops. Also there was a deadly epidemic of influenza. Well, the unsettlement of men's minds, which is found

all over the world to-day, has become in Plakos sheer madness. Remember, the people are primitive, and have savagery in their blood and odd faiths in their hearts. I do not know much about these things, but scholars have told me that in the islands the old gods are not altogether dead. The people have suffered, and they blame their sufferings on the Arabins, till they have made a monstrous legend of it. Shelley is in hell and beyond their reach, but Shelley's daughter is there. She is the witch who has wronged them, and they are the kind of folk who are capable of witch-burning."

"Good God!" I cried. "Then the girl ought never to be allowed to return."

"So I thought, and hence my little conspiracy which failed. I may tell you in confidence that it was I who prompted the action of the Greek Government and was prepared to find the compensation. But I was met by a stone wall. She insists on holding on to the place. Worse, she insists on going back. She went there last spring, and the spring is a perilous time, for the people have had the winter to brood over their hatred. I do not know whether she is fully conscious of the risk, for sometimes I think she is still only a child. But last year she was in very real danger, and she must have felt it. Behind all her bravado I could see that she was afraid."

It was an odd tale to hear in a commonplace drawing-room, and it was odder to hear it from such a narrator. There was nothing romantic about Ertzberger. I dare say he had the imaginative quickness of his race, but the dominant

impression was of solid good sense. He looked at the thing from a business man's point of view, and the cold facts made him shudder.

"What on earth is her reason?" I asked. "Has she any affection for Plakos?"

"She hates it. But there is some stubborn point of honour which forbids her to let it go. She has her grandfather's fierce obstinacy. Fate has dared her to defend her own, and she has accepted the challenge. . . . It is not merely the sense of property. I think she feels that she has a duty—that she cannot run away from the consequences of her father's devilry. Her presence there at the mercy of the people is a kind of atonement."

"Has she any friends in the island?"

"An old steward is the only man in the house. She may have her well-wishers outside, but they cannot be many, for she has not lived continuously there for years. Last spring I tried to have her guarded, but she saw through my plan and forbade it. All I could do was to have the place watched on my own account. This winter my information is that things are worse. There is famine in the hills, and the hillmen are looking with jealous eyes towards the house by the sea. The stories grow wilder, too."

"What kind?"

"Oh, witchcraft. That the Arabins are sorcerers and that she herself is a witch. Every misfortune in the island is laid to her account. God knows what may happen this spring, if she persists in going back! My hope was that she might find some lover who would make her forget the obsession, but on the contrary the obsession

has made her blind to lovers. Perhaps you have noticed it. . . . She seems to flirt outrageously, but she keeps every man at a distance. . . . Now, do you understand Miss Arabin a little better? "

I was beginning to. A picture was growing up in my mind of something infinitely pathetic, and terribly alone. A child terrified by a nightmare life which she did not understand—carried off to a new environment from which she extracted what was most feverish and vulgar, for she had no canons, yet keeping through it all a pitiful innocence—returning to a half-comprehension which revolted her soul—resolute to face the consequences of the past with an illogical gallantry. I did not know when I had heard a tale that so moved me.

" You will not refuse her if she asks your help? " Ertzberger pleaded.

" But what can I do? " I said. " I'm a lawyer and she doesn't want legal advice, even if I were free to give it her."

" She has got the notion that you can help her. Don't ask me why or how. Call it a girl's fancy and make the best of it. I cannot influence her, Derwent couldn't, but you may, because for some reason or other she believes that you are wise. . . . I think . . . I think that she thinks that you can tell her what precisely she has to fear in Plakos. There is a mass of papers, you know."

" What to fear! " I exclaimed. " Surely you have just made that plain. A famished and half-civilised peasantry with a long record of ill treatment. Isn't that enough? "

" There may be something more," Ertzberger said slowly. " She has an idea that there is

something more . . . and she is terrified of that something. If you can get rid of her terrors you will be doing a humane act, Sir Edward. The trouble, as I have told you, is that she will take so few into her confidence."

"Look here, Mr. Ertzberger," I said. "I will be quite frank with you. Miss Arabin did not attract me—indeed I have not often been more repelled by a young woman. But what you have said puts a new complexion on her behaviour. Tell her I am willing to do my best for her, to advise her, to help her in any way I can. But if she wouldn't listen to you, you may be certain she won't listen to me."

"That's very good of you," he said, rising. "She proposes to go to Plakos in March. Pray God we can put some sanity into her in the next three months."

XVI: THE DITHYRAMB

TWO days later I had to go north by an early train from Euston, and opposite my platform a special was waiting, to take a hunting party down to somewhere in the Shires. Around the doors of the carriages stood a number of expensive-looking young people, among whom I recognised Miss Arabin. She wore a long fur coat and sniffed at a bunch of violets, while in her high clear voice she exchanged badinage with two young men. As she stood with one foot on the carriage step, her small head tilted backward, her red lips parted in laughter, it was hard to connect her with the stricken lady of Ertzberger's story. Just as the

special was leaving I saw Vernon hurry up, also in hunting-kit. He cast one glance at Miss Arabin, and found a seat in another carriage. I hoped the Pytchley would have a fast day, for I did not see these two fraternising during waits at covert-side.

Curiously enough I saw the girl again the same week, also in a railway train. I was returning from Liverpool, and our trains halted beside each other at Rugby. She was alone in her carriage, the winter dusk was falling but the lights were not yet lit, and I saw her only faintly, silhouetted against the farther window. She was not asleep, but her head was sunk as if in a dream. In the few seconds during which I watched I had a strong impression of loneliness, almost of dejection. She was alone with her thoughts, and they were heavy.

That evening on my return to my flat I found a big parcel of papers. Characteristically there was no covering letter or identification of any sort, but a glance showed me what they were. My time after dinner that night was at my own disposal, and I devoted it to reading them. I believe I would have put aside work of whatever urgency for that purpose, for Plakos had begun to dominate my thoughts.

The papers were a curious jumble—no legal documents, but a mass of family archives and notes on the island. I observed that there was nothing concerned with Shelley. Most of the things had to do with old Tom Arabin—correspondence, original and copied, which had passed between him and his friends or enemies. There were letters from Byron and Shelley and Trelawny, one from no less a person than Sir Walter

Scott, many from John Cam Hobhouse, official dispatches from the British Foreign Office, a formal note or two from Castlereagh, and several long and interesting epistles from Canning, who seemed to have had some friendship for the old fellow. There was a quantity, too, of correspondence with Continental statesmen, and I observed several famous names. All this I put on one side, for it did not concern my purpose.

Then there was old Tom Arabin's diary, which I skimmed. It was a very human and explosive document, but there was little about Plakos in it. Tom was more interested in the high politics of Europe than in the little domain he had acquired. Next I turned up a manuscript history of the island in French, written apparently about 1860 by a Greek of the name of Karapanos. This was a dull work, being merely a summary of the island's record under Venetian and Turkish rule, and the doings of its people in the War of Liberation. Then came a bundle of early nineteenth-century maps and charts, and some notes on olive culture. There was a batch, too, of verses in Greek and English, probably Tom's work and not very good. There was a pedigree of the Arabin family in the old Irtling days, and a great deal more junk which had not even an antiquarian interest. I shoved away the papers with a sense of failure. There was nothing here to throw light on Plakos; if such material existed it must have been in Shelley's papers, of which his daughter had doubtless made a bonfire.

Then I noticed something among the notes on olive culture, and drew out a thick old-fashioned

envelope heavily sealed with green wax, which bore the Arabin device of a Turk's head. I opened it and extracted a sheet of yellowish parchment, covered closely with Greek characters. I was taught Greek at school, though I have forgotten most of it, but I never professed to be able to read even the printed Greek of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This document seemed to be of that date, and its insane ligatures and contractions completely defeated me. But there might be something in these hieroglyphics, so I bundled up the rest of the papers and locked the envelope in a dispatch box.

Next day I paid a visit to a Chancery barrister of my acquaintance, whose hobby was mediæval Greek and who had written a monograph on Aldus Manutius. He examined the thing with delight, pronounced the calligraphy fifteenth century, and promised to write out the contents for me in decent Greek script.

It was not till early in the New Year that I got the manuscript back from him. The task, he said, had been very difficult, and though he was pretty certain that he had got the transliteration correct, he did not profess to be able to construe it. "I'm a typographer," he wrote, "not a scholar. The thing, too, is obviously corrupt, and I should call it the work of an uneducated man who copied what he did not understand. But it is very curious. It seems to be an account of a place called Kynætho. Better show it to——" and he mentioned several names.

I did not happen to know any of the people he cited, and it occurred to me that I might consult

Vernon. He was, I knew, a fine scholar, and he had kept up his interest in Greek literature. So I sent the original and the modern version to him, saying that the document had come into my hands professionally and I should like to know if he could make anything of it.

Next day I had Vernon on the telephone and he seemed to be excited. "Where on earth did you pick up that thing?" he asked. "I suppose it isn't a fake?"

"Genuine enough," I replied, "but I can't tell you its story yet. Can you make sense of it?"

"I wouldn't say exactly 'sense,' but I can translate it after a fashion. I worked at it last night till the small hours. If I knew the *provenance* of the manuscript, I might be able to understand it better. Come and dine to-night, and we'll talk about it."

Vernon had taken a flat in Cleveland Row, and it was a proof of our gradual estrangement that till that evening I had never been inside its doors. Indeed we had not met since that Sunday at Wirlesdon.

"I saw you at Euston one morning before Christmas," I said. "Miss Arabin was going to hunt in the same train."

"Miss Arabin?" he puzzled. "I don't think I know——"

"The queer girl who was at Wirlesdon."

"Is that her name? I didn't know it. She rides well, but her manners are atrocious. Lord, how I dislike these *déracinés*! Let's get dinner over, for I've a lot to say to you about your jig-saw puzzle. It's extremely interesting, you know."

Later in the evening he put before me several

sheets of foolscap on which he had written the translation in his small beautiful hand.

"The thing is headed *Ta Exotika*," he said. "That puzzled me at first, till I remembered the phrase in Basil of Cæsarea. It was the word used by the early Christians to describe the old divinities. Whoever wrote this—I don't mean the fifteenth-century scribe, but the original author—was no doubt a Christian, and he is describing a belief and a rite which existed in his time at a place called Kynætho."

"Where is that?"

"I'm hanged if I know. It's a fairly common place-name in Greece. There's one in Arcadia."

I read his translation and could not make much of it. It reminded me of a schoolboy's version of a bit of Herodotus. "In Kynætho," said the writer, "there is a custom at the Spring Festival of welcoming the Queen (*Despoina* was the word) with the rites of the tympanon and the keston, such as they use in the Mysteries. There is a certain sacred place, a well beside a white cypress, from which all save the purified are excluded. In Kynætho the Queen is known as Fairborn (*Kalligenia*). In winter the Queen is asleep but she wakes in Spring, wherefore the Spring month is called by her name. . . ." After this came a fuller description of the rites and a lot of talk about "mantic birds."

"There's nothing much in the first part," said Vernon. "It's the ordinary ceremony of the rebirth of Demeter. But notice that she is called 'Lady of the Wild Things.' There was a mighty unpleasant side to Demeter as well as an idyllic

one, and it didn't do to take liberties with the Queen of the Shades. But read on."

The writer went on to say that in time of great distress at Kynætho there was a different ceremony. It then became necessary to invite not only the Mistress but the Master. For this purpose a virgin and a youth must be chosen and set apart in a hallowed place, and fed upon sacred food. The choosing was done by the victor in a race, who was given the name of King. Then on the appointed day, after the purification, when the dithyramb had been sung, Bromios would be born from Semele in the fire, and with him would come the Mistress. After that the place would be loved by the Gods, and corn and oil and wine would be multiplied.

That was the gist of the story. The manuscript must have been imperfect, for there were gaps and some obvious nonsense, and there were fragments of verse quoted which I took to be part of the dithyramb. One ran like this :

" Io, Kouros most great. I give thee hail.
Come, O Dithyrambos, Bromios come, and bring with thee
Holy hours of thy most holy Spring. . . .
Then will be flung over earth immortal a garland of flowers,
Voices of song will rise among the pipes,
The Dancing Floor will be loud with the calling of crowned
Semele."

I laid the paper down. Vernon was watching me with bright eyes.

"Do you see what it is? Some of those lines I recognise. They come from the Hymn of the Kouretes, which was discovered the other day in Crete, and from the Pæan to Dionysos found at

Delphi, and there is a fragment of Pindar in them too. We know Koré, the Maiden, and we know the Kouros, who might be any male god—Dionysos or Zeus or Apollo—but this is the only case I ever heard of where both Koré and Kouros are found in the same ceremony. Kynætho, wherever it was, must have fairly gone on the bust. . . . It's amazingly interesting, and that's why I want to know the story of the manuscript. I tell you it's a find of the first importance to scholarship. Look at the other things too—the sacred race and the winner called the King, just like the Basileus at the Olympic games.

"And there's more," he went on. "Look at the passage about the hallowing of the maiden and the youth. How does it go?" He picked up the paper and read: "'Then the Consecrator shall set aside a youth and a virgin, who shall remain consecrate in a sanctity which for all others shall be a place unapproachable. For seven days they shall be fed with pure food, eggs and cheese and barley-cakes and dried figs and water from the well by the white cypress.' Do you see what that means? It was a human sacrifice. The fellow who wrote this skates lightly over the facts—I don't believe he was a Christian after all, or he wouldn't have taken it so calmly. The boy and the girl had to die before the Gods could be re-born. You see, it was a last resource—not an annual rite, but one reserved for a desperate need. All the words are ritual words—*horkos*, the sanctuary, and *abatos*, the tabu place, and *hosioter*, the consecrator. If we knew exactly what *hosiotheis* meant we should know a good deal

about Greek religion. There were ugly patches in it. People try to gloss over the human sacrifice side, and of course civilised Greeks like the Athenians soon got rid of it ; but I haven't a doubt the thing went on all through classical times in Thessaly and Epirus and Arcadia and some of the islands. Indeed in the islands it survived till almost the other day. There was a case not so long ago in Santorini."

He pressed me to tell him the origin of the paper, but I felt reluctant to mention Miss Arabin. He was so deeply prejudiced against the girl, that it seemed unfair to reveal to him even the most trivial of her private affairs. I put him off by saying it was the property of a client, and that I would find out its history and tell him later.

"I have made a copy of the Greek text," he said. "May I keep it?"

I told him, certainly. And that was all that happened during the evening. Formerly we would have sat up talking and smoking till any hour, but now I felt that the curtain was too heavy between us to allow of ordinary conversation. We would get at once into difficult topics. Besides I did not want to talk. The fact was that I was acquiring an obsession of my own—a tragic defiant girl moving between mirthless gaiety and menaced solitude. She might be innocent of the witchcraft in which Plakos believed, but she had cast some outlandish spell over me.

Before the end of the week Miss Arabin rang me up.

"You're Sir Edward Leithen? I sent you some papers. Have you looked at them?"

I told her I had.

"Then you had better come and talk to me. Come on Saturday and I'll give you luncheon. Half-past one."

There was no word of thanks for my trouble, but I obeyed the summons as if it had been a royal command. She had taken a flat in a block off Berkeley Square, and I wondered what sort of environment she had made for herself. I think I expected a slovenly place full of cushions and French novels and hot-house flowers. Instead I found a large room wholly without frippery—a big bare writing-table, leather arm-chairs like a man's smoking-room, and on the walls one or two hunting-prints and some water-colour sketches of English landscape. There were few books, and those I looked at were county history. It was a mild frosty day and the windows were wide open. The only decorations were some dogwood branches and hedgerow berries—the spoil which townsfolk bring back in winter from country week-ends.

She was in tweeds, for she was off to Wirlesdon that afternoon, and—perhaps in my honour—she had forborne to powder her face. Once again I was struck by the free vigour of her movements and the quick vitality of her eyes. The cabaret atmosphere was clearly no part of the real woman; rather, as I now saw her, she seemed to carry with her a breath of the fields and hills.

At luncheon we talked stiltedly of the Nantleys and hunting, but no sooner was coffee served than she came to business.

"Theodore has told you about me? You see the kind of fence I'm up against. What I want

to know is just exactly how high and thick it is, and that no one can tell me. I liked your looks the first time I saw you, and everyone says you are clever. Now, understand one thing about me. I'm not going to show the white feather. Whatever it is, I'm going to stick it out. Have you that clear in your head? "

As I looked at the firm little chin I believed her.

" Well, can you enlighten me about the fence? You've heard all that Theodore has to say, and you know the cheerful sort of family I belong to. Did you find anything in the papers? "

" You've read them yourself? " I asked.

" I tried to, but I'm not clever, you see. I thought my grandfather's journal great nonsense. I had never heard of most of the names. But you're good at these things. Did you make nothing of them? "

" Nothing." I ran over the items in the bundle, not mentioning the Greek manuscript, which seemed to me to have nothing to do with the subject. " But there must be other papers."

She flushed slightly. " There were many others, but I burned them. Perhaps you can guess why."

" Miss Arabin," I said, " I want to help you, but I don't think we need bother about the papers. Let's go back to the beginning. I suppose it's no use my urging you to get out of Plakos, settle in England, and wipe all the past out of your memory? "

" Not the slightest."

" I wonder why. After all it's only common sense."

" Common cowardice," she retorted, with a toss

of her head. "I have known Theodore all my life and I have forbidden him to raise that question. I have known you about a month and I forbid *you*."

There was something so flat-footed and final about her that I laughed. She stared at me haughtily for a moment, and then laughed also.

"Go on with what you were saying," she said. "I stay at Plakos, and you must make your book for that. Now then."

"Your family was unpopular—I understand, justly unpopular. All sorts of wild beliefs grew up about them among the peasants and they have been transferred to you. The people are half savages, and half starved, and their mood is dangerous. They are coming to see in you the cause of their misfortunes. You go there alone and unprotected, and you have no friends in the island. The danger is that, after a winter of brooding, they may try in some horrible way to wreak their vengeance on you. That is what I learned from Mr. Ertzberger."

The summary, as I made it, sounded unpleasant enough, but the girl did not seem to feel it so. She nodded briskly. "That, at any rate, is what Theodore says. He thinks they may make me a sacrifice. Stuff and nonsense, *I* say."

The word "sacrifice" disquieted me. It reminded me of the Greek which Vernon had translated.

"Some risk there must be," I went on, "but what I cannot tell is the exact amount of it. Even among a savage people unpopularity need not involve tragedy. You were in Plakos last spring. Tell me what happened."

She fitted a cigarette into a long amber holder, and blew a cloud of smoke which she watched till it disappeared.

"Nothing much. I was left entirely to myself. There was only one servant in the house, old Mitri the steward, and I had also my maid. The whole establishment was sent to Coventry. We had to get our food from the mainland, for we could buy nothing, except now and then a little milk through Mitri's married daughter. It wasn't pleasant, I can tell you. But the worst was when I went for a walk. If I met a man he would make the sign of the evil eye and spit. If I spoke to a child its mother would snatch it up and race indoors with it. The girls and women all wore blue beads as a charm against me, and carried garlic. I could smell it wherever I went. Sometimes I wanted to cry and sometimes I wanted to swear, but you can do nothing with a silent boycott. I could have shaken the fools."

"What had they against you? Did you ever find out?"

"Oh, Mitri used to tell us gossip that he had heard through his daughter, but Mitri isn't too popular himself, and he is old and can go about very little. It seemed they called me Basilissa. That means Queen and sounds friendly enough, but I think the word they really used was *diabolissa*, which means a she-devil. The better disposed ones thought I was a Nereid—that's what they call fairies—but some said I was a *strigla*—that's a horrible kind of harpy, and some thought I was a *vrykolakas*, which is a vampire. They used to light little fires in the graveyards to keep me

away. Oh, I got very sick of my reputation. It was a hideous bore not to be able to go anywhere without seeing scared people dodging up by-ways, and making the sign of the cross, and screaming for their children—simply damnable.”

“It must have been damnable. I should have thought it rather terrifying too.”

“Don’t imagine that they frightened me. I was really more sorry than angry. They were only foolish people scared half out of their minds, and, after all, my family has done a good deal to scare them. It is folly—nothing but folly, and the only way to beat folly is to live it down. I don’t blame the poor devils, but I’m going to bring them to a better mind. I refuse to run away because of a pack of fairy tales.”

“There were no hostile acts?” I asked.

She seemed to reflect. “No,” she answered. “One morning we found a splash of blood on the house door, which sent old Mitri to his prayers. But that was only a silly joke.”

“Mr. Ertzberger hinted that there might be trouble this year from the people in the hills?”

Her face hardened.

“I wish to Heaven I knew that for certain. It would be the best news I ever got. Those hill-men are not my people, and if they interfere I will have them whipped off the place. I will not have any protection against my own peasantry—Theodore is always pressing me, but I won’t have it—it would spoil everything—it wouldn’t be the game. But if those filthy mountaineers come within a mile of Plakos I will hire a regiment to shoot them down. Pray God they come. We of

the coast have always hated the mountains, and I believe I could rally my people."

"But I thought you owned the whole island?"

"No one owns the hills. My grandfather obtained the seignury of Plakos, but he never claimed more than the good land by the sea. The hills have always been a no-man's-land full of bandits. We paid them dues—I still pay them—and we did not quarrel, but there was no coming and going between us. They are a different race from our pure Greek stock—mongrels of Slav and Turk, I believe."

The spirit of the girl comforted me. If Ertzberger's news was true, it might save the situation, and bring the problem out of the realm of groping mystery to a straightforward defence of property. . . . But after all the hills were distant, and the scared tenants were at the house door. We must face the nearer peril.

"Is there no one in the village," I said, "whom you can have it out with? No big farmer? What about the priests?"

She shook her head. "No one. The priests do not love my family, for they call themselves Christians, while we are Catholics."

Twenty years spent in examining witnesses has given me an acute instinct about candour. There was that in the girl's eyes and voice as she spoke which told me that she was keeping something back, something which made her uneasy.

"Tell me everything," I said. "Has no priest talked to you?"

"Yes, there was one. I will tell you. He is an old man, and very timid. He came to me at

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night, after swearing Mitri to tell no one. He urged me to go away for ever."

Her eyes were troubled now, and had that abstracted look which I had noted before.

"What was his reason?"

"Oh, care for his precious church. He was alarmed about what had happened at Easter."

She stopped suddenly.

"Have you ever been in Greece at Easter—during the Great Week? No? Then you cannot imagine how queer it is. The people have been starved all Lent, living only on cuttle-fish soup and bread and water. Everyone is pale and thin and ill-tempered. It is like a nightmare."

Then in rapid staccato sentences she sketched the ritual. She described the night of Good Friday, when the bier with the figure of the crucified Christ on it stands below the chancel step, and the priests chant their solemn hymn, and the women kiss the dead face, and the body is borne out to burial. With torches and candles flickering in the night wind, it is carried through the village streets, while dirges are sung, and the tense crowd breaks now and then into a moan or a sigh. Next day there is no work done, but the people wander about miserably, waiting on something which may be either death or deliverance. That night the church is again crowded, and at midnight the curtains which screen the chancel are opened, and the bier is revealed—empty, but for a shroud. "Christ is risen," the priest cries, as a second curtain is drawn back, and in the sanctuary in an ineffable radiance stands the figure of the risen Lord. The people go mad with joy, they light their

tapers at the priest's candle, and like a procession of Bacchanals stream out, shouting "He is risen indeed." Then to the accompaniment of the firing of guns and the waving of torches the famished peasants, maddened by the miracle they have witnessed, feast till morning on wine and lamb's flesh in the joy of their redemption.

She drew the picture for me so that I saw it as if with my own eyes, and my imagination quickened under the spell of her emotion. For here was no longer the cool matter-of-fact young woman of the world, with no more than tolerance for the folly of superstition. It was someone who could enter into that very mood, and feel its quivering nerves and alternate despair and exultation.

"What had the priest to complain of?" I asked.

"He said that the people were becoming careless of the Easter holiness. He said that last year the attendance at the rite was poor. He feared that they were beginning to think of something else."

"Something else!" Two of the most commonplace words in the language. She spoke them in an even voice in an ordinary London dining-room, with outside the wholesome bustle of London and the tonic freshness of an English winter day. She was about to go off to a conventional English week-end party at a prosaic country house. But the words affected me strangely, for they seemed to suggest a peril far more deadly than any turbulence of wild men from the hills—a peril, too, of which she was aware.

For she was conscious of it—that was now perfectly clear to me—acutely conscious. She had

magnificent self-command, but fear showed out from behind it, like light through the crack of a shutter. Her courage was assuredly not the valour of ignorance. She was terrified, and still resolute to go on.

It was not my business to add to that terror. Suddenly I had come to feel an immense pity and reverence for this girl. Ertzberger was right. Her hardness, her lack of delicacy and repose, her loud frivolity, were only on the surface—a protective sheathing for a tormented soul. Out of a miserable childhood and a ramshackle education she had made for herself a code of honour as fine and as hard as steel. It was wildly foolish, of course, but so perhaps to our dull eyes the innocent and the heroic must always be.

Perhaps she guessed my thoughts. For when she spoke again it was gently, almost hesitatingly.

"I scarcely hoped that you could tell me anything about Plakos. But I rather hoped you would say I am right in what I am doing. Theodore has been so discouraging . . . I rather hoped from your face that you would take a different view. You wouldn't advise me to run away from my job——?"

"God forbid that I should advise you at all," I said. "I see your argument, and, if you will let me say so, I profoundly respect it. But I think you are trying yourself—and your friends also—too high. You must agree to some protection."

"Only if the hill folk give trouble. Don't you see, protection would ruin everything if I accepted it against my own people? I must trust myself

to them—and—and stick it out myself. It is a sort of atonement."

Then she got up briskly and held out her hand. "Thank you very much, Sir Edward. It has done me good to talk to you. I must be off now or I'll miss my train. I'll give your love to Mollie and Tom."

"We shall meet again. When do you leave England?"

"Not till March. Of course we'll meet again. Let me know if you have any bright idea. . . . Élise, Élise! Where's that fool woman?"

Her maid appeared.

"Get a taxi at once," she ordered. "We haven't any time to waste, for I promised to pick up Lord Cheviot at his flat."

I asked one question as I left. "Have you ever heard of a place called Kynætho?"

"Rather. It's the big village in Plakos close to the house."

XVII: HOW A LAWYER ABANDONED LAW

I ONCE read in some book about Cleopatra that that astonishing lady owed her charm to the fact that she was the last of an ancient and disreputable race. The writer cited other cases—Mary of Scots, I think, was one. It seemed, he said, that the quality of high-coloured ancestors flowered in the ultimate child of the race into something like witchcraft. Whether they were good or evil, they laid a spell on men's hearts. Their position, fragile and forlorn, without the wardenship of male kinsfolk, set them on a

romantic pinnacle. They were more feminine and capricious than other women, but they seemed, like Viola, to be all the brothers as well as all the daughters of their father's house, for their soft grace covered steel and fire. They were the true sorceresses of history, said my author, and sober men, not knowing why, followed blindly in their service.

Perhaps Koré Arabin was of this sisterhood. At any rate one sober man was beginning to admit her compelling power. I could not get the girl from my thoughts. For one thing I had awakened to a comprehension of her beauty. Her face was rarely out of my mind, with its arrogant innocence, its sudden brilliancies and its as sudden languors. Her movements delighted me, her darting grace, the insolent assurance of her carriage, and then, without warning, the relapse into the child or the hoyden. Even her bad manners soon ceased to annoy me, for in my eyes they had lost all vulgarity. They were the harshnesses of a creature staving off tragedy. Indeed it was her very extravagances that allured, for they made me see her as a solitary little figure set in a patch of light on a great stage among shadows, defying of her own choice the terrors of the unknown.

What made my capture complete was the way she treated me. She seemed to have chosen me as her friend, and to find comfort and security in being with me. To others she might be rude and petulant, but never to me. Whenever she saw me she would make straight for me, like a docile child waiting for orders. She would dance or sit out with me till her retinue of youth were goaded to

fury. She seemed to guess at the points in her behaviour which I did not like and to strive to amend them. We had become the closest friends, and friendship with Koré Arabin was a dangerous pastime.

The result was that I was in a fair way of making a fool of myself. No . . . I don't think I was in love with her. I have never been in love in my life, so I am not an expert on the subject, but I fancy that love takes people in a different way. But I was within measurable distance of asking her to be my wife. My feeling was a mixture of affection and pity and anxiety. She had appealed to me, and I had become her champion. I wanted to protect her, but how was a middle-aged lawyer to protect a determined girl from far-away perils which he did not comprehend? The desperate expedient of marriage occurred to me, but I did not believe she would accept me, and, if she did, would not the mating of age and youth be an outrage and a folly? Nevertheless I was in a mood to venture even on that.

I must have presented a strange spectacle to my friends. There were other men of forty in London at the time who behaved as if they were twenty-five—one buxom Cabinet Minister was to be seen at every dance—but none, I am certain, cut an odder figure than I. The dancing Cabinet Minister sought the ball-room for exercise, because he preferred dancing to golf. I had no such excuse, for I danced comparatively little; my object was patently the society of one particular lady. In Koré's train I found myself in strange haunts. I followed her into the Bohemian *coulisses* to which

Shelley Arabin's daughter had an entrée—queer studio parties in Chelsea where the women were shorn and the men left shaggy: the feverish literary and artistic salons of the emancipated and rather derelict middle-class: dances given at extravagant restaurants by the English and foreign new-rich, where I did not know or wish to know one single soul. Also we appeared together at houses which I had frequented all my life, and there my friends saw me. Of course they talked. I fancy that for about two months I was the prime subject of London gossip. I didn't care a hang, for I was in a queer, obstinate, excitable mood. We hunted together, too, and there is no such nursery of scandal as the hunting-field. With a great deal of work on hand I found this new life a considerable strain, and I was perfectly conscious that I was playing the fool. But, though I don't think I was in love with her, I simply could not let the girl out of my sight.

Now and then my conscience awoke and I realised with a shock that the time was slipping past, and that the real problem was still unsolved. I knew that I could not shake Koré in her resolution, and I suppose I hoped blindly that something would occur to prevent her acting on it. That something could only be a love affair. I was perfectly certain that she was not in love with me, but she might accept me, and at the back of my head I had the intention of putting it to the test. Ertzberger had divined what was going on and seemed to approve. "A boy is no use to her," he said more than once. "Besides, she wouldn't look at one. She must marry a grown man." He implied

that I filled the bill, and his assumption gave me an absurd pleasure. If anyone had told me that I would one day go out of my way to cultivate a little Jew financier, I would have given him the lie, yet the truth is that, when I was not with Koré, I hungered for Ertzberger's company. He alone understood what was in my mind, and shared my anxieties. "She must not go back," he kept declaring; "at all costs she must be kept away from Plakos—at any rate during this spring. I get disquieting reports. There is mischief brewing in the hills, and the people of the coast have had a bitter winter of famine. There has been a lot of sickness too, and in the village at the house gates the mortality among the children has been heavy."

"You mean Kynætho?" I asked.

"Kynætho." He looked at me curiously. "You seem to have been getting up the subject. . . . Well, I don't like it. If she goes there in April there may be a disaster. Upon my soul, we should be justified in having her kidnapped and shut up in some safe place till the summer. So far as I can learn, the danger is only in the spring. Once let the people see the crops springing and the caiques bringing in fish, and they will forget their grievances."

Early in March I was dining with the Nantleys, and after dinner Mollie took me aside for a talk. As I have told you, she is one of my oldest friends, for when I was a grubby little private schoolboy and she was a girl of thirteen we used to scamper about together. I had had her son Hugo in my chambers, before he went into Parliament, and Wirlesdon had always been a sort of home to me.

Mollie was entitled to say anything she liked, but when she spoke it was rather timidly.

"I hear a good deal of talk about you," she said, "and I can't help noticing too. Do you think it is quite fair, Ned?"

"Fair to whom?" I asked.

"To Koré Arabin. You're different from the boys who run after her. You're a distinguished man with a great reputation. Is it fair to her to turn her head?"

"Is that very likely? What if she has turned mine?"

"Do you really mean that?" she cried. "I never thought of it in that way. Do you honestly want to marry her?"

"I don't know . . . I don't know what I want except that I must stand by her. She's in an appallingly difficult position, and badly needs a friend."

"Yes. But there's only one way in which a man can protect a young woman. Do you mean to marry her?"

"She wouldn't accept me."

"But you mean to ask her?"

"It may come to that," I said.

"But, Ned dear, can't you see it wouldn't do? Koré is not the right sort of wife for you. She's—she's too—— Well, you've a career before you. Is she the woman to share it with?"

"It's not many months since at Wirlesdon you implored my charity for Miss Arabin."

"Oh, I don't want to say a word against her, and if you were really desperately in love I would say nothing and wish you luck. But I don't

believe you are. I believe it's what you say—charity, and that's a most rotten foundation to build on."

Mollie in such affairs is an incurable romantic.

"I promise never to ask her to marry me unless I am in love," I said.

"Well, that means you are not quite in love yet. Hadn't you better draw back before it is too late? I can't bear to see you making a bad blunder, and Koré, dear child, would be a bad blunder for you. She's adorably pretty, and she has wonderful qualities, but she is a little savage, and very young, and quite unformed. Really, really it wouldn't do."

"I admit the difficulties, my dear Mollie. But never mind me, and think of Miss Arabin. You said yourself that she was English at heart and would be very happy settled in England."

"But not with you."

"She wouldn't accept me, and I may never propose. But if I did, and she accepted me, why not with me?"

"Because you're you—because you're too good for a rash experiment."

"I'm not good enough for her, for I'm too old, as you've just told me. But anyhow your argument thinks principally of me, not of Miss Arabin. It is she who matters."

Mollie rose with a gesture of impatience. "You are hopeless, Ned. I'm sick of you hard, unsusceptible, ambitious people. You never fall in love in your youth, but wait till after forty and then make idiots of yourselves."

I had a different kind of remonstrance from

Vernon. We saw little of each other in those days beyond a chance word in the street or a casual wave of the hand in the club smoking-room. When I thought of him it was with a sense of shame that I had let him slip so hopelessly out of my life. Time had been when he was my closest friend, and when his problem was also my problem. Now the whole story of his dream seemed a childish fancy.

One night in March I found him waiting for me in my rooms.

"I came round to say good-bye," he said. "I shall probably leave London very soon."

It shows how completely I had forgotten his affairs that I did not remember that his particular crisis was drawing near, that, as he believed, the last door in his dream-world would soon be opened.

Then, before I could ask about his plans, he suddenly broke out:

"Look here, I hope there's no truth in what people tell me."

His tone had the roughness of one very little at his ease, and it annoyed me. I asked coldly what he meant.

"You know what I mean—that you're in love with Miss What's-her-name—the girl I met at Wirlesdon."

"I don't know that you've any right to ask the question, and I'm certainly not going to answer it."

"That means that you are in love," he cried. "Good God, man, don't tell me that you want to marry that—that tawdry girl!"

I must have reddened, for he saw that he had gone too far.

"I don't mean that—I apologise. I have no reason to say anything against her."

Then his tone changed.

"Ned, old man, we have been friends for a long time and you must forgive me if I take liberties. We have never had any secrets from each other. My own affairs give me a good deal to think about just now, but I can't go away with an easy mind till I know the truth about you. For God's sake, old fellow, don't do anything rash. Promise me you won't propose to her till I come back in April."

His change of manner had softened me, and as I saw the trouble in his honest eyes I felt a return of the old affection.

"Why are you anxious on my account?"

"Because," he said solemnly, "I know that if you married that girl our friendship would be over. I feel it in my bones. She would always come between us."

"I can't make any promises of that kind. But one thing I can promise—that no woman will ever break our friendship."

"You don't understand. Some women wouldn't, but that girl— Well, I can say no more. Good-bye, Ned. I'll hunt you up when I come back."

He left me with a feeling of mingled regret and irritation. I hated to go against Vernon's wishes, but his manner when he had spoken of Koré, the look in his eyes, the inflection of his voice, conveyed an utter distaste which made me angry. I pictured him at Severns nursing his unreasoning dislike of the poor child. Vernon, as my nephew Charles had said, was a prig, and his narrow world

had room only for blameless and vapid virginity. The promise he had asked of me was an outrage.

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Yet I kept a promise which I had never made. For suddenly Cinderella disappeared from the ball. After a country-house dance I drove her back to town in my car, and left her at the door of her flat. During the long drive she had talked more seriously than I had ever known her to talk before, had spoken of herself and her affairs with a kind of valiant simplicity. The only sophisticated thing about her was her complexion. All day afterwards my conviction was growing that she was the woman for me, that I could make her not only secure but happy. We were by way of dining with the Lamanchas, and I think if we had met that night I should have asked her to marry me. . . . But we did not meet, for by the evening she was gone.

I looked for her in vain in the Lamanchas' drawing-room and my hostess guessed what I sought. "I'm so sorry about Koré Arabin," she whispered to me. "She was coming to-night, but she telephoned this afternoon that she was unexpectedly called out of town." I did not enjoy my dinner, and as soon as I could decently leave I hurried off to her flat. It was shut up, and from the porter on the ground floor I learned that she and her maid had left with a quantity of luggage to catch the night boat to France. He was positive that she had gone abroad, for he had seen the foreign labels, and Miss Arabin had told him she would not be back for months. The keys of the flat had been sent to her solicitors.

With a very uneasy mind I drove to the Ertzbergers' house in Belgrave Square. Ertzberger had just come in from a City dinner, and his wife seemed to be giving some kind of musical party, for the hall was full of coats and hats and extra footmen, and the jigging of fiddles drifted down the staircase. He took me to his study at the back of the house, and when he heard my news his face grew as solemn as my own. There was nothing to be done that night, for the Continental mail had long since gone, so I went back to my chambers with a pretty anxious mind. I felt that I had let something rare and precious slip out of my hand, but far more that this preciousness was in instant danger. Honestly I don't think that I was much concerned about myself. I wanted Koré Arabin saved—for me—for everyone—for the world. If I was in love with her it was with an affection more impersonal than usually goes by that name. It was as if an adored child had gone amissing.

Regardless of our many engagements, Ertzberger and I appeared on the doorstep of Messrs Mower & Lidderdale, the solicitors, at the hour when according to the information given me by telephone the senior partner usually arrived. Mr. Mower confirmed our fears. Miss Arabin had returned to Plakos; she had been preparing for some weeks for the journey; he had not advised it—indeed he had not been asked his advice nor would he have dared to volunteer it. "A very strong-minded young lady," he repeated—"I might almost say strong-headed." She had sold the lease of her flat, and had left no instructions about her return. Yes, she was well supplied

with money. Miss Arabin was her own mistress absolutely, for her father had created no trust. He had nothing more to tell us, and Ertzberger departed for the City and I for the Temple.

In the afternoon I was rung up by Ertzberger in my room in the House of Commons. He had been making inquiries, he said—he had his own ways of doing that sort of thing—and he had discovered that Koré had recently sold large parcels of stocks. She had been selling out steadily throughout the winter, and now had practically no investments left. The proceeds had been deposited on current account in her bank. There his information stopped, but he was profoundly disquieted. “That child has all her fortune in cash under her hand,” he said, “and God knows what she means to do with it. Any moment she may beggar herself, and no one can prevent her.”

That night I understood that my infatuation was over, if indeed it had ever existed. I wanted the girl safe, and I did not care who saved her, but I wanted it so much that at the moment nothing in heaven or earth seemed to matter in comparison.

It was now near the end of March, the Courts had just risen and Parliament was about to adjourn for the Easter vacation. I had a good deal of important work on hand, but I was entitled to a holiday, and I thought I could arrange for at any rate a fortnight's absence from town. But whether I could arrange it or not I meant to go, for I could no more settle to my tasks than a boy can settle to Tacitus on the day he is playing for his school. When Ertzberger according to our arrangement

turned up at my chambers that night after dinner, he found me busy with an atlas and a Continental Bradshaw.

"I am going to Plakos," I said.

"That is good. You are still a young man, and you have been a soldier. It is very good. But if you had not gone, I had decided to go myself."

"This is Wednesday. Miss Arabin left last night. She will get there—when?"

He made some calculations. "Not before Tuesday. You might overtake her, but I do not think that is necessary. Easter is the danger-point and the Greek Easter is still a fortnight off. Besides, you must stop a day in Athens."

"I shall want help. Can you get me half-a-dozen handy fellows I can trust?"

"I had thought of that. Indeed, I telegraphed about it this afternoon. I can find you the men—and money, of course, if you want it. I will find you a lieutenant, too, and make all arrangements about transport. That at least I can do. You realise, Sir Edward, that there is a certain danger in this enterprise?"

"I realise that Miss Arabin in a week's time will be in deadly danger. . . . I must have a day or two to wind up my work here. I think I can leave on Saturday morning."

As a matter of fact I left London on the Friday night.

XVIII: MY COMING TO PLAKOS

I CAME to Plakos in a blind sea-fog. After a day and a night of storm the wind died utterly, and we made the isle on a compass course, feeling our way in by constant soundings. A thick salt dew hung on every stay and hawser, the deck and bulwarks swam with moisture, and our coats were in an instant drenched as if we had been out in a hurricane. Sea and land alike were invisible. The air was thick and oppressive to the breath, and every muscle in the body felt weak and flaccid. Also there was a strange quiet—only the ripple caused by our slow movement and the creak of sodden cordage. I might have been a shade looking on an island of the dead.

I had reached Athens in record time, but there I found a weariful delay. In spite of Ertzberger's influence the wheels were clogged. I was met at the Piræus by his agent, one Constantine Maris, whose instructions were to hold himself at my disposal. I took to Maris at once—a young fellow of thirty, who had been in the Greek regular army and had been the right-hand man of Zimbrakis when at Salonika his troops declared for Venizelos. He had been all through the war till it ended in Bulgaria's submission, had been twice wounded and once in prison, and had been chosen by Ertzberger to represent him in Athens because

of his truculent honesty and tireless energy. Both in character and appearance he was more like a Frenchman than a Greek—a Norman for choice, for he had reddish-brown hair and a high-bridged northern nose. He had the additional merit of being well educated, having put in two years at the Sorbonne: and he talked excellent French. His family were of Athens, but his mother, I think, was from one of the islands. He had the looks and manners of a soldier.

But Maris had found the task set him almost impossible. Ertzberger had bidden him get together a batch of reliable fellows who would obey orders and ask no questions, but as we rumbled Athens-ward from the Piræus in the little train he confessed that such men were not to be found. In the war it was otherwise, but the best had all gone back to the country villages. He had collected a dozen, but he was not enthusiastic about them, except a certain Janni, who had been a corporal in his old battalion. When he paraded them for my inspection I was inclined to agree with him. They were an odd mixture—every kind of clothes from the dirty blue jeans of the stoker to the black coat and pointed yellow shoes of the clerk—ages from nineteen to sixty—physique from prize-fighter to sneak-thief. All had served in the war, however, and the best of them, Janni, had an empty left sleeve. After much consultation we dismissed two and were left with ten who at any rate looked honest. Whether they would be efficient was another matter. Maris proposed to arm them with revolvers, but not till we got to Plakos, in case they started shooting up

the town. They were told that they were wanted as guards for an estate which was threatened by brigands, but I doubt if they believed it. The younger ones seemed to think that our object was piracy.

Transport was another problem. I had hoped to be able to hire a small steam yacht, but such a thing was not to be had, and the best we could do was to induce a dissolute-looking little Leghorn freighter, named the *Santa Lucia*, to go out of its way and touch at Plakos. Maris told the captain a yarn about men being needed there for making a new sea-wall. The boat was bound for the Dodecanese, and would pick us up on her return a fortnight later.

Before we rounded Cape Sunium we got into foul weather, a heavy north-easter and violent scurries of rain. Our ruffians were all sea-sick and lay about like logs, getting well cursed by the Italian sailors, while Maris and I in the one frowsy little cabin tried to make a plan of campaign. I found out at once that Maris was well informed about the situation in Plakos, partly from Ertzberger and partly from his own knowledge. He knew about Shelley Arabin's career, which seemed to be the common talk of the Ægean. Of Koré he had heard nothing save from Ertzberger, but he had much to tell me of Plakos and its people. They had a name for backwardness and turbulence, and the Government seemed to leave them very much to themselves. There were gendarmes, of course, in the island, but he fancied they didn't function. But the place had sent good soldiers to Venizelos, and its people were true Hellenes. After

an interval when he expatiated on that Hellenic empire of the islands which was the dream of good Venizelists, he returned to their superstition. "That is the curse of my countrymen," he cried. "They are priest-ridden." He was himself, he told me, a free-thinker and despised all mumbo-jumbo.

I told him that the trouble was not with the priests, but he did not seem to understand, and I did not attempt to explain.

Our task as he saw it was straightforward enough—to protect the House during the Easter season when fear of the girl as a witch and the memory of Shelley's misdeeds might induce some act of violence. There was also the trouble with the hill folk, and this seemed to him the greater danger. The dwellers in the stony mountains which filled the centre and south of the island had always been out of hand, and, since the winter had been cruel and the war had unsettled the whole earth, he thought it likely that they might have a try at looting the House, which they no doubt held to be full of treasure, since the Arabins had a name for wealth. I could see that he didn't quite believe in danger from the coast folk, however beastly their superstitions might be. He had the Greek respect for a mountaineer and contempt for the ordinary peasant.

We studied the map—a very good one prepared for the British Navy—and on Maris's advice I decided to begin by dividing our forces. My first business was to get into the House and discover how things were going. But with danger threatening from the hills it would be unwise for all of us

to concentrate in a place from which egress might be difficult. Now the House stood at the north-west corner of the island, and the hill country began about ten miles to the south-east. He proposed to send five of our men, under Corporal Janni, to a little port called Vano on the west coast some miles south of the House. They would take supplies with them—we were well provided with these—and reconnoitre towards the hills, giving out that they were a Government survey party. The rest of us would land at the House, and, after satisfying ourselves about the position, would get in touch with Janni by the overland route. Our first business was strictly reconnaissance; Janni could not hope to prevent mischief from the hills if it were really on its way, but he could satisfy himself as to its extent and character, and then join us in the defence of the House, which was our main task. Maris was confident about this. He did not see how a dozen armed men in a strong place could fail to hold off a mob of undisciplined peasants.

For an extra payment the captain of the *Santa Lucia* was induced to carry Janni and his men to Vano. Weapons were served out to all, and I gave Janni a map which he professed to be able to read. Then in the shrouding fog Maris and I and our five got into the ship's one boat and were rowed ashore. We had our supplies both of food and ammunition in half-a-dozen wooden cases, and the wretched cockle was pretty low in the water. I knew from my former visit that the landing-place was just below the House, and the fog seemed to me a godsend, for it would enable

us to get indoors unobserved. My only doubt was the kind of reception we might get from Koré.

As it turned out, the mist was our undoing. We were landed at a stone jetty in a dead white blanket which made it difficult to see a yard ahead. Our baggage was put on shore, the boat started back, and in a moment both sound and sight of it were swallowed up. It was an eerie business, and I felt the craziness of our errand as I stood blinking on the wet cobbles. There was no human being about, but the dim shapes of several caiques and some kind of lugger seemed to show below us as we started along the jetty. Our five ruffians had recovered from their sea-sickness, and, feeling solid ground beneath them, were inclined to be jolly. One of them started a song, which I promptly checked. Maris ordered them to wait behind with the boxes, and to keep dead quiet, while he and I prospected inland.

My recollection of that visit in 1914 was hazy, for I had only seen the landing-place from the causeway above it, and at the time I had been too preoccupied to observe accurately. But I was pretty certain that at the shore end of the jetty there were some rough stone steps which led to the causeway. I groped for them in the mist but could not find them. Instead I came on a broad track which bore the mark of wheels and which led away to the left. I waited for the steep to begin, but found no sign of it. The land was dead flat for a long way, and then I came on a rough boundary wall.

It was an orchard with blossoming trees—that much I could see through the brume—and at the

end was a cottage. My first thought was to retrace my steps and try a cast to the right, for I still believed that we had found the proper landing-place, and had somehow missed the causeway. But, as I hesitated, there came one of those sudden clearings in the air which happen in the densest fogs, and I had a prospect of some hundreds of yards around me. We were on the edge of a village; the cottage we had reached was at the extreme seaward end, a little detached from the rest; beyond lay what seemed to be a shallow valley with no sign of the House and its embattled hill.

It would have been well for us if there and then we had turned and gone back to the jetty, even at the risk of relinquishing our supplies and having to scramble for miles along a difficult shore. For, of course, we had come in that infernal fog to the wrong place. The skipper had landed us at Kynætho instead of below the House, and though I knew from the map that Kynætho was at the House's gates, yet it was on the east side, distant at least two miles by coast from the spot which Vernon and I had visited.

It was Maris who decided me. The cottage seemed a solitary place where discreet inquiries might be made without rousing attention. He had little stomach for wandering around Plakos in fog, and we had our five men and the baggage to think of. I followed him into the rough courtyard, paved with cobbles, and strewn with refuse. The low walls were washed with red ochre and above the lintel a great black pentacle was painted. Also over the door was hung a bunch of garlic.

There was a woman standing in the entry watching us. Maris took off his hat with a flourish and poured out a torrent of soft-sounding dialect. She replied in a harsher accent, speaking with the back of her throat. She seemed to be inviting us to enter, but her face was curiously without expression, though her eyebrows worked nervously. She was a middle-aged woman, terribly disfigured by smallpox ; her features were regular, and she had large, prominent, vacant black eyes. She was not in the least repulsive, but somehow she was not reassuring.

As we entered the cottage she called out to someone at the back. A second later I heard footsteps as of a child running.

Maris, as I learned afterwards, told her the story we had agreed on—that we were a Government survey party sent from Athens to make a map of the island. Then he felt his way to more delicate subjects. This was Kynætho, he understood? There was a large house near which belonged to some foreigners? English, weren't they? Where, exactly, did it lie from the village, for, if he might venture to explain what madam no doubt knew, one must have a starting-point for a survey, and the Government had chosen that house?

The woman's eyebrows twitched, and she crossed herself. She flung a hand over her left shoulder. "The place is there," she said. "I know nothing of it. I do not speak of it."

All the time she was looking at us with her staring empty eyes, and I realised that she was in an extreme fright. There was certainly nothing

in our appearance to discompose her, and I had the uneasy feeling which one has in the presence of a human being who is suffering from an emotion that one cannot fathom. Maris whispered to me that he did not like the look of things. "She has not offered us food," he said.

Her ear must have caught some sound from out-of-doors, for her face suddenly showed relief. She walked to a window and cried to someone outside. Then she turned to us. "There are men now to speak with you." She had found her tongue, for as she hustled us out she kept muttering, with sidelong glances at us, what seemed to be an invocation to Saint Nicolas. Also she gripped Maris violently by the shoulder and spat words into his ear. He told me afterwards that she was advising him not to be a fool and to go home.

The little courtyard had filled with people, most of them men, but with two or three old crones in the forefront. Their aspect was not threatening, but rather puzzled and timid. The men took off their hats in response to Maris's bow, and politely waited for him to speak. I noticed that they were a well-made, upstanding lot, but with the same flat expressionlessness as the woman of the cottage, and I guessed that that was a mask to hide fear.

Maris told them the same story of our errand. He said—I repeat what he told me later—that our men and baggage were still down by the beach, and that he wanted to be directed to the inn. There was dead silence. The little crowd stared at us as if their lives depended on it, but not a syllable came in reply.

This made Maris angry. "Are you dumb mules," he asked, "not to answer a simple question? I have heard that you of the islands boasted of your hospitality. Is this the way to treat strangers?"

Still no answer. His taunts were as futile as his exposition. But, since I had nothing to do but to look on, I saw something which made me uneasy. The crowd was drawing together, and each was covertly touching the other's sleeve. There was a purpose in this mob, a purpose of action, and I don't like that kind of purpose when it is accompanied by fear.

"Since you will not speak," Maris cried, "I will go to your priest. Where is his dwelling? Or do you treat your church as you treat your visitors?"

This time he got a reply. A dozen voices spoke, and a dozen hands pointed towards the village.

"It seems you are not dumb after all? We will seek a lodging from the priest, who doubtless has some regard for his country's Government. We have baggage with us—boxes of instruments and food—and they are now at the jetty. I want two able-bodied fellows to help carry them, and I will pay them well. Who offers?"

But no one offered. Once again they were like gaping cattle. And then an old beldam in the foreground, who had been crossing herself vigorously, cried out a monosyllable and instantly it was taken up in a shout.

Maris turned to me with an angry smile. "They are advising us to go home. I can mention an island, my friend, in which there is going to be

trouble. Let us go back to the shore. Perhaps the sight of our belongings will change their mind."

They did not obstruct us, but opened a lane for us to pass—opened it with feverish haste, as if they were afraid of coming too near us. The fog had now thinned to a light haze, through which I already felt the glow of the sun. As we moved shorewards they trailed after us, keeping always a respectful distance, and halted fifty yards from the jetty.

Our five fellows were sitting smoking on the boxes, and since we could get no help from the villagers there was nothing for it but to carry the baggage ourselves. My first notion was to go straight to the House, of which by this time I could judge the whereabouts, and it would have been well for us perhaps if I had acted on that impulse. But, until I had prepared the way, I was shy of facing Koré Arabin with a defence force which would make her furious, and I had a notion, too, that if I marched in broad daylight to the House gates there might be trouble with these scared and sullen natives. So I decided to go first to the inn, where we could leave our stuff, and then to interview the priest. After all, I knew from Koré that the priest was alarmed about the local situation, and from him I might get some counsel. It seemed to me a case for wary walking.

I could have laughed at that progress village-wards, if I hadn't been so anxious. The mob in front of us had doubled in size, and retreated mechanically before us till we were in the village street. The sun was now bright in the sky, and I had a view of the straggling houses, grouped

thickly in the centre where there seemed to be a kind of *place*, and thinning out into farms and enclosures on the slopes of the green hills. It was a wide, shallow vale bounded on the south by low ridges; but on the west rose a higher tree-clad hill, and there were glimpses of white masonry which I took to be the House. Once we were in the village the crowd was enlarged by women and children. They kept a good distance, retiring a pace for every step we took, and when we entered the untidy square they huddled against the house doors as if they were forming guard. They were perfectly silent, even the children. It was an eerie business, I can assure you, promenading before that speechless, staring gallery. They were not an ill-looking race, as I have said, for the men were mostly well-built and upstanding, and though the old wives looked like the Witch of Endor the young ones were often comely. But you could see that they were bitter poor, for their cheeks were thin and their eyes hollow. And beyond doubt they were in the throes of some nervous terror. I felt as if at any moment something might snap and the air be filled with a wild screaming.

The inn was easy enough to find. A big plane tree grew before it, and in the yard behind the low whitewashed walls grew a second, beside a stone fountain which had not been erected within these last five hundred years. The place was only a wine-shop, with no guest-rooms for travellers, but there were ample outbuildings where our men could encamp. But there was no sign of any landlord. Maris and I pushed indoors and found no trace of life in the big drinking-room with its

sanded floor, or in the purlieus beyond. The inn folk must have gone to swell the crowd in the street. But we found a reasonably clean barn at the back of the yard, and there Maris bade our fellows make their quarters, get ready their breakfast and await our return. Then the two of us set out to find the priest.

The villagers had not pressed nearer. When we emerged into the street they were standing as we had left them, patiently staring. Maris cried out, asking to be shown the priest's house, and at that the spell seemed to be broken, for there was a shout in reply. A visit to the priest seemed to be in the popular view the right course for us to take. We were directed to a house a hundred yards on, next door to a squat church, and to my surprise we were not followed. Once they had seen us enter, the crowd remained to watch the inn door.

The priest had evidently been apprised of our coming. His dwelling was only a bigger cottage, but in the furnishing of it there were a few signs of a class above the peasantry—a shelf of books, one or two gaudy religious pictures, a Swiss cuckoo clock, and, incongruously enough, two of the cheap copies of Tanagra statuettes which they sell in the Athens shops. I dare say he imagined that they were figures of saints. He was an old man, nearer eighty than seventy to my eye, and much bent in the shoulders. An unkempt beard fell over his chest, and his white hair was long and brushed back from his forehead like a recent fashion among young men in England. The skin was waxen white, and the lines on his face were like

the grey shadows in a snowdrift. His eyes were mild, benevolent and fanatical. He looked stupid but kind, and, like everybody else in that mad place, horribly frightened.

With him Maris went straight to the point.

"We are a Government survey party, Pappa," he said. "But that story is for the peasants. To you we open our hearts. This gentleman is a colonel in the army of Britain, and likewise a member of the British Government. He is also a friend of the lady in the House of Plakos. What gadfly has bitten the people of this island? Come! We know much already but we would hear your tale."

The priest—his venerable name was Hieronymos—was ready enough to tell. With a wealth of gesticulation remarkable in one so ancient, but always with a lowered voice, he repeated crudely what we already knew. The people of Plakos had suffered much and long, and were now resolved to make an end of their incubus. The girl was a witch and they had determined that she must die. They were only waiting till the convenient season. All this he said in the most matter-of-fact tone, as if it were a natural sequence of cause and effect.

"But you would not consent to such barbarity?" Maris asked.

"My consent is not asked," he replied. "Beyond doubt the woman is evil and comes of an evil stock. But the Scriptures teach mercy, and, though doubtless death is deserved, I would not counsel it. For if she is evil she is also witless. Why else did she return here, when she knew that the whole island desired her death? Did I not

go to her secretly, as Nicodemus went to our Lord, and beseech her never to return? And she has given immense sums of money to her enemies. Me she gave gold for the Church and that I have secure, but she has given it to others who have bought guns. The men from the hills, who are most bitter against her, carry rifles bought with her money."

Now I knew why the foolish child had realised her investments.

The priest was gaining confidence.

"The death of a witch may be a righteous deed," he said, "but the hearts of this people are not righteous. They are dabbling in a blacker magic than hers, for they are following the Outland Things. And that is heresy and blasphemy, which in the eyes of Holy Church are sins not less mortal than witchcraft."

Real anger, the jealous anger of a priest for his own prerogatives, blazed in his old eyes. He used for "outland things" the word *exotika*, the very word which had puzzled Vernon in the manuscript I gave him, till he found help from Basil of Cæsarea. The word caught my ear and I made Maris translate for me. He had clearly no compassion for poor Koré, but he was up in arms for his Church. Maris tried to probe the trouble, but he got the vaguest answers. The man seemed eager to unburden his soul and yet terrified to speak, and his eyes were always turning to the window and the closed street door.

Last Eastertide there had been a lamentable neglect of sacred rites. This year the carelessness was complete. Holy Week had begun, but the

minds of the people were not on its solemnities. "They fast indeed," he said, "but they do not pray." They had gone a-whoring after other gods, and what those other gods were it did not become a Christian man to consider. They meditated a sacrifice, but they had forgotten the sacrifice on which their salvation hung. "There is a madness which surges up at times in these islands. It happened so in my grandfather's day in Santorini, and there is no quelling it till some black deed has been done and the people come to their right minds in a bitter repentance." He, their priest, had become less regarded than a cur dog. Men stopped talking in the streets when he drew near, and would not meet his eyes. If he spoke, they moved off. They were conscious of a guilty purpose, and yet resolved on it, and he was powerless to check them. "They will come back, doubtless, and bemoan their folly, but in the meantime they are breaking the hearts of the saints and loading their miserable souls with sin."

Then he broke off and his face took an expression of shrewdness.

"You have brought men with you. How many?"

Maris told him ten stout fellows all armed.

"What foolishness!" he cried. "The Government should have sent a regiment—a regiment with cannons. The madmen in Plakos are fifty times your number, and they have the hill folk at their back, and that is a thousand more."

"Nevertheless," said Maris, "we may be sufficient to garrison the House, and protect the lady. I have heard that it is a strong place."

He looked at us queerly. "No garrison is sufficient against fire. They will burn the House and all that is in it. . . . Listen to me, sirs. I do not think as you think. I have no care for the woman nor for any of her accursed race, but I have much care for the souls of this wayward people, and would save them from mortal sin. There are no two ways about it—the woman must burn or she must depart. Can you carry her off?"

Maris translated to me rapidly. "Things look ugly," he said, "and I rather think this old one talks sense. But to carry off the lady we must have a ship, and God knows where we shall find one. At Vano perhaps? Maybe we did wrong to separate our forces. It strikes me that the sooner we get into touch with friend Janni the better. It is indicated that one of us must presently make his way into the House, and that one had better be you. Let us interrogate the old one about the topography of this damned village."

"You must enter the House," said the priest, in reply to Maris's question, "but it will be a task, I promise you, for Digenes the Cyprian. The place is guarded at all hours, and no one enters or leaves it without the knowledge of the warders. But it might be achieved by bold men under cover of the dark. The moon is nearing its full, and when it has set in the small hours there might be a chance."

I got out the map of the island, and tried to get him to give me my bearings. But he was hopeless with a map, and instead on the white hearth-stone he drew a plan of his own. The main road to the House from Kynætho ran west from the village square, up a lane lined with crofts and past a big

olive grove, till it reached the wood of chestnuts which was the beginning of the demesne. All the ground on this side rose steeply, and there were dwellings almost to the gates, so that it would be hard to escape detection. To the left the slopes curved in a shallow vale, bounded on the east by the main road to the hills and to Vano, and to south and west by a rim of upland beyond which lay the rugged coastline and the sea. This vale was broad and flat, and tilted up gently towards the west, and it bore the curious name of the Dancing Floor. In the old days, said the priest, the Panegyria were held in it, the island festivals before poverty and madness came to Plakos. The Dancing Floor bordered on the demesne, and he thought that a way of entry might be found there.

I made Maris ask about the shore road, but the priest was emphatic against it. There was no way into the House on that side except by the staircases from the jetty, which Vernon and I had seen in 1914, and there it was certain the watchers would be most vigilant. Besides the staircases were disused, and he believed that the postern doors had been walled up. The cliffs could not be climbed, and if the coast was followed towards the south the difficulties increased. From my recollection of the place, I thought he exaggerated, but I was not prepared to bank on a dim memory.

"There is no time to lose," he said, with an earnestness which convinced me that, though our motives might be different, our purposes were alike. "In two days it will be Good Friday, and the night after comes the solemn hour when our Lord breaks the bonds of death. I grievously fear that that is

the hour which my foolish folk have fixed for this sacrilege. If great sin is to be averted, the woman must be gone by then and the House given to the flames. The flames, I say, for whatever happens, there will be no peace in Plakos till it is in ashes. But let it be burned honestly and religiously, and not made an altar to the outland devils whom Holy Church has long ago cast into the darkness."

The problem seemed to me to be clarifying itself. I was inclined to think that the priest was too badly scared to take a balanced view of things, and also too wrapped up in his religious anxieties. I agreed that we must somehow induce Koré to come away, and that for this purpose we must get all our ten men together and beg, borrow or steal some kind of boat. It was also plain that the sooner I got inside the House the better, for Koré would need some persuading. I was not able to view the black magic of the villagers quite seriously. It was obviously a real peril, but it was so wholly outside the range of my mental conception that I took it as a straightforward risk, like that from a wild animal or a thunderstorm.

Maris and I had a short talk in French and settled our plans. He would go back to the inn and see our fellows fixed up for the night. Then he would make his way on foot towards Vano and get into touch with Janni. We fixed a point on his map, on the edge of the cliffs about two miles south of the House, where he was to bring Janni and his posse, and where next morning I was to take out the others to join him. There seemed no risk in leaving the five men in the inn for the night. The villagers would scarcely interfere with

strangers who purported to be a Government survey party and had no desire to move. Nor was it likely that any obstacle would be set in the way of Maris's own journey. After all he was moving towards Vano and away from the prohibited area.

My own case was more intricate. If I went back to the inn, it would be harder to make my way from it to the Dancing Floor, for I should have the village street to go through. We put this to the priest, and he proved unexpectedly helpful. Why should I not stay on in his house till the evening? The church was adjacent, and behind the church lay the grave-yard, by which a road could be found to the Dancing Floor. He would give me food, if I cared to share his humble meal. The old fellow might be a bigot, but he was honest and friendly and patently on our side. I beamed on him and thanked him in dumb show, while Maris made ready to start.

"Get into the House somehow and fix up a plan with the lady," he said. "That is the first job. You are quite clear about the rendezvous on the cliffs? You had better get back to the inn somehow, and to-morrow morning bring the men to join me there. The village will think we've started on our surveying—and a long way off the danger-point. You will have to open the boxes and make each man carry his own supplies. You have your gun?"

I patted my pocket. "Yes, but there isn't going to be any shooting. We haven't a dog's chance at that game, with Miss Arabin arming the natives with Mauser rifles."

XIX : RECONNAISSANCE

MANY times that day I wished that my education had included modern Greek. Through the hot afternoon and evening I remained in the little room, bored and anxious and mystified, while the priest sat opposite me, a storehouse of vital knowledge which I could not unlock. I raked up my recollection of classical Greek and tried him with a sentence or two, but he only shook his head. Most of the time he read in a little book, a breviary no doubt, and his lips muttered. An old woman came in and made ready a meal. We lunched off onion soup and black bread and a very odd-tasting cheese, and I was given a glass of some wine which smacked of turpentine. I smoked one of the two cigarettes left in my case, and afterwards fell asleep. When I woke, the old man was sitting just as I had left him, but he had laid down his book and seemed to be praying. There was no reserve now in the old face ; I saw the age of it, and the innocence, and also the blind fear. He seemed to be pleading fiercely with his God, and his mouth worked like a child's in a passion of disquiet.

Of course I might have strolled out-of-doors, and gone back to the inn, where I could have seen our five men and retrieved my pipe and pouch. It struck me that we were behaving like fools ; we had come to visit the House, and we ought to lose no time in getting there. My nap had put our previous talk out of my head, and I found myself

on my feet in a sudden impulse. Then I remembered how Maris had enjoined the utmost caution, and I remembered, too, the look of those queer people in the street. The House was *tabu*, and if I was seen going towards it I should be stopped, and I might even precipitate some wild mischief without Maris to help me. There in the priest's homely kitchen, with a belt of golden light on the floor and the hum of flies in the window, I had an acute sense of being among shadows which might suddenly turn into monstrous forms of life. The whole island seemed to me like a snake still numb from the winter cold but thawing fast into a malignant activity. And meantime Koré was all alone in that ill-omened House with the circle of hate closing around her, and I, who had come there to protect her, was still outside the cordon. I cursed the infernal fog which had brought us so fatally out of our course ; and I resolved that no power on earth should hinder me, when the dark came, from piercing the barrier.

The presbytery opened into a narrow lane with outbuildings in front of it, but from the window I could see a corner of the main street. The sun poured into the lane, and I watched the little green lizards on the wall beyond. There was scarcely a sign of life in the segment I saw of the main street ; indeed there was a silence strange in a village, so that every tiny natural noise—the chirping of grasshoppers, the slow flight of a dove—came with a startling clearness. Once a woman with a shawl over her head hurried past the opening. There should have been children playing at the corner, but there were no children nor any sound

of them. Never a cart rumbled by, nor mule nor horse crossed my line of vision. The village seemed to be keeping an eerie fast.

One man indeed I saw—a big fellow with a white blouse and long boots of untanned leather. He stood staring down the alley, and I noticed that he carried a rifle. I beckoned to the priest and we watched him together out of a corner of the window. The old man shook his head violently and muttered something which ended in “bounos.” Then he added between his teeth a word which sounded like “Callicantzari.” I had heard that word from Maris as a term of abuse—he had said, I remember, that it meant men who become beasts, like the ancient Centaurs. I guessed that this fellow must be one of the mountain-men, who were now in league with their old enemies of the coast. If they were among the besiegers, Koré could no longer refuse our help. “I will hire a regiment to shoot them down,” she had furiously told me. But what good was *our* help likely to be?

The sight of that fellow put an edge to my discomfort, and before the shadows had begun to fall I was roaming about the little room like a cat in a cage. The priest left me, and presently I heard the ringing of a bell. In the quiet, now deepened by the hush of twilight, the homely sound seemed a mockery—like the striking of the bells of a naval battery I once heard on the Yser. Then, in the midst of mud and death, it had incongruously suggested tea on the cool deck of a liner; now this tintinnabulation with its call to a meek worship had the same grotesque note of parody. Clearly there were no worshippers. I

went to the back of the cottage, and from the window of the bare little bedroom had a view of the church in that amethyst gloaming. It was a baroque edifice, probably five centuries old, but renovated during the last fifty years, and in part painted a violent red. Beside it was a tiny bell-tower, obviously far more ancient. I could see a faint light in the window, and beyond that a dark clump of ilex above which the evening star was rising.

When the priest returned it was almost dark. He lit a lamp and carefully locked the door and shuttered the window. His barren service seemed to weigh heavily on him, for he moved wearily and did not raise his long-lidded eyes. It was borne in on me that at any price I must find some means of communicating with him, for my hour of action was approaching.

I tried him in French, but he never lifted his head.

Then it occurred to me that even a priest of the Greek Church must know a little Latin. I used the English pronunciation, and though he did not understand me, he seemed to realise what tongue I was talking, for he replied in a slow broad Latin. I could not follow it, but at any rate we had found a common speech. I tore a page from my notebook and was about to write, when he snatched it and the pencil from my hand. There was something he badly wanted to say to me. He hesitated a good deal, and then in laborious capitals he wrote :

" Si populus aliquid periculi tibi minatur, invenies refugium in ecclesia." Then he scored out "*refugium*" and wrote in "*sanctuarium*."

" Quid periculi ? " I wrote.

He looked at me helplessly, and spread out his

hands. Danger, he seemed to suggest, lay in every quarter of the compass.

We used up five pages in a conversation in the doggiest kind of style. My Latin was chiefly of the legal type, and I often used a word that puzzled him, while he also set me guessing with phrases which I suppose were ecclesiastical. But the result was that he repeated the instructions he had given me through Maris. If I was to enter the House, the only way was by the Dancing Floor—it took me some time to identify "*locus saltatorum*"—and to climb the great wall which separated it from the demesne. But it would be guarded, probably by the "*incolæ montium*," and I must go warily, and not attempt it till the moon was down. Also I must be back before the first light of dawn.

I showed him my pistol, but he shook his head violently and went through a pantomime, the meaning of which was clear enough. I was not to shoot, because, though the guards were armed, there would be no shooting. But all the same I was in some deadly danger. He scribbled in abusive Latin that the people I had to fear were "*pagani, nefasti, mysteriorum abominabilium cultores*." If I were seen and pursued my only hope was to reach the church. Not his house—that was no use—but the church. Twice he printed in emphatic capitals: "*Pete sanctuarium ecclesiæ*."

Then he took me into his little bedroom, and showed me the lie of the land. The moon was now up, the fog of the morning had gone out of the air; and the outline of the church and the bell-tower and the ilex grove beyond might have been cut in amber and jet. Through the trees there appeared a

faint reddish glow as if fires were burning. I asked what this might be, and after a good deal of biting the stump of my pencil he wrote that there lay the graveyard, and the lights were burning "*ut vrykolakes absint.*" He seemed to doubt whether I could follow his meaning, but I did, for I knew about this from Koré—how the peasants kept lamps at the grave-heads to ward off vampires.

He was clear that I must traverse the valley of the Dancing Floor while the moon was up, for otherwise I should miss my way. He looked at me appraisingly and wrote "You are a soldier," implying, as I took it, that there was cover for a man accustomed to use cover. Then he drew a plan on which he marked my road. If I skirted the graveyard I should find myself on a hillside which sloped towards the Dancing Floor. I must keep this ridge, which was the northern containing wall of the place, till I reached the boundaries of the House. On no account must I go down into the valley, and when I asked why, he said that it was "*nefasta.*" That could not mean merely that it was well-guarded, but that it was held in dread by the people of Kynætho, a dread which their priest shared.

I left the house just after eleven o'clock. Our long silent sederunt had made the two of us good friends, for he wept at parting and insisted on blessing me and kissing me on the forehead. I was on his side, on the side of his Church, a crusader going into peril in a strife with heathenish evil.

It was a marvellous night for scent and colour, but as silent as the deeps of the sea. I got with all speed into the shade of the ilexes, and climbed

up a rocky slope so that I looked down on the village graveyard beyond the trees. Dozens of little lights twinkled in it like fireflies, those undying lamps which were lit to preserve the inmates from outrage by the terrible demons that enter into the bodies of the dead. Suddenly I remembered with horror that it was Koré against whom these precautions were taken—Koré, now because of her crazy gallantry alone in a doomed House, dreaming perhaps that she was winning back the hearts of her people, and knowing little of the dark forces massing against her out of the ancients of time. There was that in this mania of superstition which both infuriated and awed me; it was a thing against which a man could find no weapon. And I had the ironic recollection of how little more than a week earlier, in a case before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, I had been defending the legalisation of certain African rites, on the ground that what to one man was superstition might to another be an honest faith. I had struck a belief which had the compelling power of a fanatical religion, though it was born of the blackness of night.

The hillside was a mass of scrub and boulder, giving excellent cover, and, since the ridge shut me off from the village, I could move with reasonable speed and safety. My spirits were rising with the exercise, and the depression which had overwhelmed me in the priest's house was lifting. Then suddenly I topped a rise and found myself looking down on the Dancing Floor.

It was not a valley so much as an upland meadow, for there was no stream in it nor had there ever been one, and, though tilted up gently towards

the west, most of it was as flat as a cricket-field. There it lay in the moonlight, yellow as corn in its cincture of broken ridges, a place plainly hallowed and set apart. All my life I have cherished certain pictures of landscape, of which I have caught glimpses in my travels, as broken hints of a beauty of which I hoped some day to find the archetype. One is a mountain stream running in broad shallows and coming down through a flat stretch of heather from a confusion of blue mountains. Another is a green meadow, cut off like a garden from neighbouring wildernesses, secret and yet offering a wide horizon, a place at once a sanctuary and a watch-tower. This type I have found in the Scottish Borders, in the Cotswolds, once in New Hampshire, and plentifully in the Piedmont country of Virginia. But in the Dancing Floor I had stumbled upon its archetype. The moonlight made the farther hills look low and near, and doubtless lessened the size of the level ground, but the constriction only served to increase its preciousness.

I sat down and stared at the scene, and in that moment I underwent a great lightening of spirit. For this meadow was a happy place, the home of gentle and kindly and honourable things. Mildness and peace brooded over it. The priest had said that it was "*nefasta*," but he could only have meant that it was sacred. Sacred indeed it must be, what the Greeks of old called a *temenos*, for the dullest could not be blind to the divinity that dwelt here. I had a moment of wonder why the Arabins, lords of the island, had not included a spot so gracious in their demesne, until I saw that that

could not be. The Dancing Floor must be open to the winds and the starry influences and the spirits of earth ; no human master could own or enclose it.

You will call me fantastic, but, dull dog as I am, I felt a sort of poet's rapture as I looked at those shining spaces, and at the sky above, flooded with the amber moon except on the horizon's edge, where a pale blue took the place of gold and faint stars were pricking. The place was quivering with magic drawn out of all the ages since the world was made, but it was good magic. I had felt the oppression of Kynætho, the furtive frightened people, the fiasco of Easter-tide, the necromantic lamps beside the graves. These all smacked evilly of panic and death. But now I was looking on the Valley of the Shadow of Life. It was the shadow only, for it was mute and still and elusive. But the presage of life was in it, the clean life of fruits and flocks, and children and happy winged things, and that spring purity of the earth which is the purity of God.

The moon was declining, but it would be at least two hours before I could safely approach the House. The cover was good, I was protected by the ridge from the side of the village, and no human being was likely to be abroad on the Dancing Floor. I decided that I must get within sight of my destination before the light failed, and spy out the land. It was rough going among the ribs of rock and stone-falls and dense thickets of thorn and arbutus, but sometimes I would come on a patch of turf drenched with dew and scented with thyme. All the myrrh of Arabia was in the place, for every foot of sward I trod

on and every patch of scrub I brushed through was aromatic, and in the open places there was the clean savour of night and the sea. Also at my left hand and below lay the Dancing Floor, lambent under the moon like the cool tides of a river.

By and by I came to the end of the ridge, and had a view of the crest where the House stood. There was a blur of ebony which must be the wood that surrounded it, and bounding it a ribbon of silver-grey. I puzzled at this, till I realised that it was the wall of which the priest had spoken—a huge thing, it seemed, of an even height, curving from the dip where the village lay and running to what seemed to be the seaward scarp of the island. I was now in the danger zone, and it behoved me to go warily, so I found a shelter where the cover of the ridge ended and studied the details of the scene. The wall could not be less than fifteen feet in height, and it appeared to be regularly masoned and as smooth as the side of a house. In that landscape it was a startling intrusion of something crude and human, a defiance of nature. Shelley Arabin had built it for the sake of his sinister privacy, but why had he built it so high? And then I guessed the reason. He wanted to shut out the Dancing Floor from his life. That blessed place would have been a mute protest against his infamies.

There was a black patch in the even sheen of the wall. I wormed my way a little nearer and saw that for perhaps a dozen yards the wall had been broken down. I could see the ragged edges and the inky darkness of the shrubberies beyond. This had been done recently, perhaps within the

last month. And then I saw something more. There were men—guards—stationed at the gap. I made out their figures, and they seemed to have the baggy white shirts of the mountaineer I had seen in the village. Also they were armed. One stood in the gap, and the two others patrolled the sides, and I could see that they carried rifles at the trail. It seemed absurd that three men were needed for that tiny entrance, and I concluded that they wanted each other's company. There must be something in the task which put a heavy strain on their courage. I noticed, too, that they kept their faces resolutely averted from the Dancing Floor. When one moved he walked with his head screwed round facing the House. The shining meadow might be *nefasta*, as the priest had said, or it might be too sacred at this solemn hour of night for the profane gaze.

When I had watched them for a little it seemed to me that, though the moon had not set, these fellows were too preoccupied to be dangerous, and that I might safely continue my reconnaissance. There was not much cover, but the declining moon made an olive shadow at the upper end of the Dancing Floor, and I proceeded to crawl across it like a gillie after deer. I went very cautiously, stopping every now and then to prospect, but I found the wall now beyond my range and I had to chance the immobility of the sentries. My breeches were sopping with dew before I reached the point which I judged to be out of sight of the gap. The wall, as I had observed, curved at the sea end, and once there—unless there were further guards—I should be at liberty to test my climbing

powers. The thing looked a most formidable barrier, but I was in hopes that it might be turned where it abutted on the cliffs.

Before I realised it I was looking down on the sea.

The coast bent inward in a little bight, and a hundred feet below me the water lapped on a white beach. It was such a revelation of loveliness as comes to a man only once or twice in his lifetime. I fancy that the short commons on which I had subsisted all day and the sense of dwelling among portents had keyed me up to a special receptiveness. Behind me was the Dancing Floor, and in front a flood of translucent colour, the shimmer of gold, the rarest tints of sapphire and amethyst, fading into the pale infinity of the sky. I had come again into a world which spoke. From below came the sound of dreamily moving water, of sleepy pigeons in the rocks. Recollections of poetry fled through my mind :

“ where Helicon breaks down
In cliffs to the sea . . .

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far their light voice——”

Yes, but something was wanting. There should have been white flocks on the sward, something to link up nature with the homely uses of man, in order to produce the idyllic. This place was not idyllic, it was magical and unearthly. Above me was a walled mystery, within which evil had once been followed and a greater evil might soon be done, and there were men with quaking hearts bent upon ancient devilries.

I followed the edge of the scarp as it rose to

the highest point where the wall ended. There I had a sharp disappointment. The wall ran sheer to the edge of the cliff, and a steep buttress descended to the face of the limestone crag. The stone was as smooth as a water-worn pebble. I have been a rock-climber since I was an undergraduate, and have faced in my time some awkward problems, but this was starkly impossible. Even with a companion and a rope I do not believe it could have been done, and to attempt it alone meant the certainty of a broken neck.

I prospected eastward along the wall and found no better hope there. The thing was simply not to be climbed except by a lizard. If I had had Maris with me I might have stood on his shoulders and made a jump for the coping; as it was it might have been a hundred feet high instead of fifteen for all the good it was to me. There were no branches about to make a ladder, or loose stones to make a cairn—nothing but the short downland turf.

The sight of this insuperable obstacle effectively put a stop to my brief exhilaration of spirit. I felt small and feeble and futile. It was imperative that I should get into the House without further delay and see Koré, and yet the House was as impracticable as the moon, now swiftly setting. The rapid darkening of the world pointed out the only road. I must dodge the sentries and get through the breach in the wall. It was a wild notion, but my growing ill-temper made me heedless of risks. The men had no pistols, only rifles, and were probably not too ready in the use of them. After all I had played this game before

with success. In the first winter of the war, when I was a subaltern, I used to be rather good at wriggling across No-man's-land and eavesdropping beside the German trenches.

I didn't give my resolution time to weaken, but in the shadow of the wall made the best pace I could towards the gap. It was now really dark, with only a faint glow from the stars, and I moved in what seemed to my eyes impenetrable shade after the brightness of the moon. I was wearing rubber-soled boots and cloth gaiters, my garments were subfusc in colour, and I have always been pretty light on my feet. I halted many times to get my bearings, and presently I heard the sound of a man's tread. So far as I had judged before, two of the sentries had their patrol well away from the wall, and I might escape their notice if I hugged the stones. But one had had his stand right in the breach, and with him I would have difficulty. My hope was to dart through into the shelter of the thick shrubbery. Even if they fired on me they would be likely to miss, and I believed that they would not follow me into the demesne.

I edged my way nearer, a foot at a time, till I guessed by the sound that I was inside the beat of the patrols. I had no white about me, for my shirt and collar were drab, and I kept my face to the wall. Suddenly my hands felt the ragged edge of the gap and I almost stumbled over a fallen stone. Here it was very dark and I had the shadow of the trees inside to help me. I held my breath and listened, but I could not hear any noise from within the breach. Had the sentry there deserted his post?

I waited for a minute or so, trying to reckon up the chances. The tread of the man on my right was clear, and presently I could make out also the movement of the man on my left. Where was the third? Suddenly I heard to the right the sound of human speech. The third must be there. There was a sparkle of fire, too. The third sentry had gone to get a light for his cigarette.

Now was my opportunity, and I darted into the darkness of the gap. I was brought up sharp and almost stunned by a blow on the forehead. There was a gate in the gap, a stout thing of wattles with a pole across. I strained at it with my hands, but it would not move.

There was nothing for it but to bolt. The sentries had been alarmed—probably horribly alarmed—by the noise, and were drawing together. The only safety lay in violent action, for they had a means of getting light and would find me if I tried to lurk in the shadows. I raised my arms, in the orthodox ghostly fashion, howled like a banshee, and broke for the open.

I was past them before they could stop me and plunging down the slope towards the Dancing Floor. I think that for the first moments they were too scared to shoot, for they must have believed that I had come out of the forbidden House, and when they recovered their nerve I was beyond their range. The upper slope was steep, and I went down it as Pate-in-Peril in *Redgauntlet* went down Errickstane-brae. I rolled over and over, found my feet, lost them again, and did not come to rest till I was in the flats of the meadow. I looked back and saw a light twinkling at the gap. The

guards there must have been amazed to find the gate intact and were now doubtless at their prayers.

I did not think that, even if they believed me flesh and blood, they would dare to follow me to the Dancing Floor. So I made my way down it at a reasonable pace, feeling rather tired, rather empty and very thirsty. On the road up I had decided that there was no stream in it, but almost at once I came to a spring. It was a yard across, bubbling up strongly, and sending forth a tiny rill which presently disappeared in some fissure of the limestone. The water was deliciously cold and I drank pints of it. Then it occurred to me that I must put my best foot forwards, for there was that trembling in the eastern sky which is the presage of dawn. My intention was to join my fellows in the inn courtyard, and meet Maris there in the morning. After all, the inhabitants of Kynætho had nothing as yet against me. All they knew of me was that I was a surveyor from the Government at Athens, whose presence no doubt was unwelcome but who could hardly be treated as an enemy.

I reached the eastern bounds of the Dancing Floor, and scrambled up on the ridge above the ilexes of the graveyard. The lamps were still twinkling like glow-worms among the graves. From there it was easy to get into the lane where stood the priest's house, and in a few minutes I was in the main village street. The chilly dawn was very near and I thought lovingly of the good food in our boxes. My first desire was a meal which should be both supper and breakfast.

The door of the courtyard stood open, and I pushed through it to the barn beyond. The place was empty—not a sign of men or baggage. For a moment I thought they might have been given quarters in the inn, till I remembered that the inn had no guest-room. I tried the other outbuildings—a stable, a very dirty byre, a place which looked like a granary. One and all were empty.

It was no use waking the landlord, for he probably would not answer, and in any case I did not understand his tongue. There was nothing for it but to go back to the priest. My temper was thoroughly embittered, and I strode out of the courtyard as if I were at home in my own village.

But my entrance had been observed, and the street was full of people. I doubt if Kynætho slept much these days, and now it seemed that from every door men and women were emerging. There was something uncanny in that violent vigilance in the cold grey light of dawn. And the crowd was no longer inert. In a second I saw that it was actively hostile, that it wanted to do me a mischief, or at any rate to lay hands on me. It closed in on me from every side, and yet made no sound.

It was now that I had my first real taste of fear. Before I had been troubled and mystified, but now I was downright afraid. Automatically I broke into a run, for I remembered the priest's advice about the church.

My action took them by surprise. Shouts arose, meaningless shouts to me, and I broke through the immediate circle with ease. Two fellows who moved to intercept me I handed off in the best

Rugby football style. The street was empty before me and I sprinted up it at a pace which I doubt if I ever equalled in my old running days.

But I had one determined pursuer. I caught a glimpse of him out of a corner of my eye, one of the young men from the hills, a fellow with a dark hawk-like face and a powerful raking stride. In my then form he would have beaten me easily if the course had been longer, but it was too short to let him develop his speed. Yet he was not a yard behind me when I shot through the open door of the church.

I flung myself gasping on the floor behind one of the squat pillars. As I recovered my breath I wondered why no shot had been fired. A man with a gun could have brought me down with the utmost ease, for I had been running straight in the open. My second thought was that the priest had been right. The peasant had stopped in his tracks at the church door. I had found safety for the moment—a sanctuary or, it might be, a prison.

XX: THE BOAT IN THE BAY

THE morning light was filtering through the windows, and since the glass was a dirty yellow, the place seemed still to be full of moonshine. As my eyes grew accustomed to it, I made out the features of the interior. A heavy curtain separated the sanctuary from the chancel; the floor was of rough stone, worn with the feet and knees of generations of worshippers; there were none of the statues and images which one is

accustomed to in a Roman church, not even a crucifix, though there may have been one above the hidden altar. From a pillar hung an assortment of votive offerings, crutches, oar-blades, rudders of ships, old-fashioned horn spectacles. The walls were studded with little ikons of saints, each one with its guttering lamp before it. The place smelt dank and unused and mouldy, like a kirk in winter-time in some Highland glen. Behind me the open door showed an oval of pure pale light.

I was in a mood of profound despondency which was very near despair. The men had gone and with them our stores of food and ammunition. God knew where Maris was or how I should find him again. The village was actively hostile, and I was shut up in the church as in a penitentiary. I was no nearer Koré than when we landed—farther away indeed, for I had taken the wrong turning, and she was shut off from me by mountainous barriers. I could have laughed bitterly when I thought of the futility of the help which I had been so confident of giving her. And her danger was far more deadly than I had dreamed. She was the mark of a wild hate which had borrowed some wilder madness out of the deeps of the past. She had spoken of a "sacrifice." That was the naked truth of it; any moment tragedy might be done, some hideous rite consummated, and youth and gallantry laid on a dark altar.

The thought drove me half crazy. I fancy the lack of food and sleep had made me rather light-headed, for I sat in a stupor which was as much anger as pity—anger at those blinded islanders, at my own feebleness, at Koré's obstinacy. This

was succeeded by an extreme restlessness. I could not stay still, but roamed about examining the ill-favoured ikons. There was a little recess on the right of the chancel which was evidently the treasury, for I found a big chest full of dusty vestments and church plate. Sacrilege must have been an unknown crime in Kynætho, for the thing was unlocked.

Then I noticed a strange object below the chancel step. It seemed to be a bier with a shrouded figure laid on it. The sight gave me a shock, for I thought it a dead body. Reluctantly I approached it and drew back the shroud, expecting to see the corpse of a peasant.

To my amazement it was a figure of Christ—a wooden image, rudely carved but with a strange similitude of life. It reminded me of a John the Baptist by Donatello which I once saw in Venice. The emaciated body was naked but for the loin cloth, the eyes were closed, the cheeks sunken. It was garishly painted, and the stigmata were done in a crude scarlet. But there was power in it, and dignity and a terrible pitifulness. I remembered Koré's story. This was the figure which on the night of Good Friday, after the women had kissed it and wailed over it, was borne in procession among the village lanes and then restored to its sepulchre. This was the figure which at the Easter Resurrection stood in a blaze of candles before the altar, the Crucified and Risen Lord.

That sight worked a miracle with me. I suddenly felt that I was not alone, but had august allies. The Faith was behind me, that faith which was deep in the heart of Kynætho though for the

moment it was overlaid. The shabby church, the mazed and ignorant priest took on suddenly a tremendous significance. . . . They were the visible sign and warrant of that creed which we all hold dumbly, even those who call themselves unbelievers—the belief in the ultimate omnipotence of purity and meekness.

I reverently laid the shroud again over the figure, and must have stood in a muse before it, till I found that the priest had joined me. He knelt beside the bier, and said his prayers, and never have I heard such an agony of supplication in a man's voice. I drew back a little, and waited. When he had finished he came to me and his eyes asked a question.

I shook my head and got out my notebook.

He asked me if I had breakfasted, and when I wrote the most emphatic negative which my Latin could compass, he hobbled off and returned with some food under his cassock. It was only cheese and black bread, but I ate it wolfishly and felt better for it. I looked on the old man now with a sincere liking, for he was my host and my ally, and I think he had changed his attitude towards me. Those minutes beside the bier had established a bond between us.

In the recess I have mentioned there was a door which I had not hitherto noticed. This opened into a kind of sacristy, where the priest kept his odds and ends. There was a well in the floor of it, covered by an immense oaken lid, a well of cold water of which I had a long drink. The old man drew several buckets, and set about cleaning the chancel, and I was glad to lend a hand. I spent

the better part of the morning like a housemaid on my knees scrubbing the floor and the chancel step, while he was occupied inside the sanctuary. The physical exertion was an anodyne to my thoughts, which in any case were without purpose. I could do nothing till the night came again.

On one of my journeys to the sacristy to fetch water I saw a face at the little window, which opened on the yard of the priest's house. To my immense relief it was Maris, very dirty and dishevelled, but grinning cheerfully. That window was a tight fit, but he managed to wriggle half through and a strong pull from me did the rest. He drank like a thirsty dog out of my bucket, and then observed that a church had its drawbacks as a resort, since one couldn't smoke.

"I have much to tell you, my friend," he said, "but first I must interview his Holiness. By God, but he has the mischievous flock."

I do not know what he said to the priest, but he got answers which seemed to give him a melancholy satisfaction. The old man spoke without ever looking up, and his voice was flat with despair. Often he shook his head, and sometimes he held up his hand as if to avert a blasphemy. Maris turned to me with a shrug of the shoulders. "This madness is beyond him, as it is beyond me. It is a general breaking down of wits. What can you and I, soldiers though we be, do against insanity? Presently I must sleep, and you too, my friend, to judge by your heavy eyes. But first I make my report."

"I suppose we are safe here?" I said.

"Safe enough, but impotent. We can take

our sleep confidently, but it is hard to see that we can do much else. We are in quarantine, if you understand. But to report——”

He had gone to the inn the night before, and found our five men supping and playing cards like Christians. They seemed to understand what was required of them—to wait for me and then join Janni and the others at the rendezvous on the western cliffs. So far as he could judge they had had no communication of any kind with the people of the village. Then he had set out with an easy mind on the road to Vano. No one had hindered him; the few villagers he met had stared but had not attempted even to accost him. So over the moonlit downs he went, expecting to find Janni and the other five in bivouac in the open country towards the skirts of the hills.

He found Janni alone—on the roadside some miles east of Vano, squatted imperturbably by a fire, in possession of five revolvers and ample stores, but without a single follower. From the one-armed corporal he heard a strange tale. The party had made Vano before midday in the *Santa Lucia*, had landed, and marched inland from the little port, without apparently attracting much attention. He himself had explained to the harbour-master that they had been sent to do survey work, and the wineshop, where they stopped for a drink, heard the same story. They had then tramped up the road from Vano to the hills, stopping at the little farms to pass the time of day and pick up news. They heard nothing till night-fall, when they encamped beside a village among

the foothills. There Janni talked to sundry villagers and heard queer stories of Kynætho. There was a witch there who by her spells had blighted the crops and sent strange diseases among the people, and the cup of her abominations was now full. St. Dionysios had appeared to many in a dream summoning them to Kynætho in the Great Week, and the best of the young men had already gone thither.

That was all that Janni heard, for being the man in authority he spoke only with the elders, and they were wary in their talk. But the others, gossiping with the women, heard a fuller version which scared them to the bone. Your Greek townsman is not a whit less superstitious than the peasant, and he lacks the peasant's stolidity, and is prone to more speedy excitement. Janni did not know exactly what the women had told his men, except that Kynætho was the abode of vampires and harpies for whom a surprising judgment was preparing, and that no stranger could enter the place without dire misfortune. There might be throat-cutting, it was hinted, on the part of the young men now engaged in a holy war, and there would for certain be disaster at the hand of the *striglas* and *vrykolakes* in the House, for to them a stranger would be easy prey.

Whatever it was, it brought the men back to Janni gibbering with terror and determined to return forthwith to Vano. The island was accursed and the abode of devils innumerable, and there was nothing for honest men to do but to flee. They would go back to Vano and wait for a boat, the

Santa Lucia or some other. To do the rascals justice, Janni thought that they might have faced the throat-cutting, but the horrors of the unseen and the occult were more than they could stomach. Janni, who was a rigid disciplinarian, had fortunately possessed himself of their pistols when they encamped for the night, and he was now in two minds whether he should attempt to detain them by force. But the sight of their scared eyes and twitching lips decided him that he could do nothing in their present mood, and he resolved to let them go back to Vano till he had seen Maris and received instructions. They had already had wages in advance, and could fend for themselves till he made a plan. So he doled out to each man a share of the supplies and watched them scurry off in the direction of the coast, while he smoked his pipe and considered the situation. There about two in the morning Maris found him.

The defection of these five men suggested to Maris that the same kind of trouble might be expected with the batch in Kynætho. So he and Janni humped the stores and started off across the downs to the rendezvous on the cliffs which he had settled with me. That occupied a couple of hours, and there Janni was left with orders not to stir till he was summoned. The place was a hollow on the very edge of the sea, far removed from a road or a dwelling—a lucky choice, for it had been made at haphazard from the map without any local knowledge. Then Maris set off at his best pace for Kynætho, skirting the Dancing Floor on the south, and striking the road to Vano a mile or so from the village.

There he met the rest of our posse, and a more dilapidated set of mountebanks he declared he had never seen. So far as he could gather from their babble, they had been visited in the small hours by a deputation of villagers, who had peremptorily ordered them to depart. The deputation backed its plea not by threats but by a plain statement of facts. Kynætho was labouring under a curse which was about to be removed. No doubt the villagers expounded the nature of the curse with details which started goose-flesh on their hearers. What was about to be done was Kynætho's own affair, and no stranger could meddle with it and live. They may have enforced their argument with a sight of their rifles, but probably they did not need any mundane arguments to barb the terror which their tale inspired. For they succeeded in so putting a fear of unknown horrors into those five Athens guttersnipes that they decamped without a protest. They did not even stay to collect some provender, but fled for their lives along the Vano road.

When Maris met them they were paddling along in abject panic. One man still carried unconsciously a tin from which he had been feeding, another clutched a crumpled pack of cards. They had their pistols, but they had no thought of using them. Pantingly they told their story, irking to be gone, and when Maris seemed to be about to detain them they splayed away from him like frightened sheep. Like Janni, he decided that it was no good to try to stop them—indeed he was pretty clear by now that even if they stayed they would be useless for the job we had in hand. He

cursed their female relatives for several generations, and speeded the hindmost on his way with a kick.

His next business was to find me, and he concluded that I would probably be still in the neighbourhood of the House. So, as the moon was down, he retraced his steps by the south side of the Dancing Floor and reached the edge where the wall abutted on the cliffs probably an hour after I had been there. He shared my view about the impracticability of an entrance to the demesne at that point. As it was now almost daylight he did not dare to follow the wall, but returned to Janni on the cliffs, who gave him breakfast. He was getting anxious about my doings, for he argued that if I returned to the inn to look for the men there would probably be trouble. It seemed to him important that the village should still believe him to have gone off, so he was determined not to show himself. But he must get in touch with me, and for that purpose he decided first to draw the priest's house. He had a difficult journey in the broad daylight by way of the graveyard. It would have been impossible, he said, if the village had been living its normal life, for he had to pass through a maze of little fields and barns. But all farm work seemed to have been relinquished, and not a soul was to be seen at the lower end of the Dancing Floor. Everybody, except the guards round the House, seemed to be huddling in the village street. In the end he got into the priest's house, found it empty and followed on to the church.

I told him briefly my doings of the night. I

could see that he was completely in the dark as to what was happening, except that Kynætho, under the goad of some crazy superstition, intended very resolute mischief to the House and its châtelaine. You see he had not talked to Koré—had indeed never seen her, nor had he read the disquieting manuscript which Vernon had translated for me. I did not see how I could enlighten him, for on that side he was no scholar, and was too rooted in his brand of minor rationalism to take my tale seriously. It was sufficient that we were both agreed that the House must be entered, and Koré willy-nilly removed.

“But we have no ship,” he cried. “The lady would be no safer in the open than in the House, for they mean most certainly that she shall die. I think it may come to putting our backs to the wall, and the odds are unpleasant. We cannot telegraph for help, for the office is in the village and it has been destroyed. I have ascertained that there is no wire at Vano, or elsewhere in the island.”

Things looked pretty ugly, as I was bound to admit. But there was one clear and urgent duty, to get into the House and find Koré. Before we lay down to snatch a little sleep, we made a rough plan. Maris would try the coast to the north and see if an entrance could be effected by a postern above the jetty where Vernon and I had first landed. He thought that he had better undertake this job, for it meant skirting the village, and he believed he might pass in the darkness as one of the men from the hills. He could talk the language, you see, and, if accosted, could put up some kind of

camouflage. I was to make for Janni, and then the two of us would try along the shore under the cliffs in the hope that some gully might give us access to the demesne north of the point where the wall ended. We were to rendezvous about breakfast time at Janni's camp, and from the results of the night frame a further programme.

I slept without a break till after eight o'clock in the evening, when the priest woke us and gave us another ration of the eternal bread and cheese. I felt frowsy and dingy and would have given much for a bath. The priest reported that the day in the village had passed without incident, except that there had been a great gathering in the central square and some kind of debate. He had not been present, but the thing seemed to have deepened his uneasiness. "There is no time to lose," he told Maris, "for to-morrow is Good Friday, and to-morrow I fear that unhallowed deeds may be done." Maris discussed his route with him very carefully, and several more pages of my notebook were used up in plans. It was going to be a ticklish business to reach the jetty—principally, I gathered, because of the guards who watched all the sides of the demesne which were not bounded by the cliffs or the great wall. But the priest seemed to think it possible, and Maris's Gascon soul had illimitable confidence.

My road was plain—up the ridge on the south side of the Dancing Floor till it ended at the sea, a matter of not more than four miles. I skirted as before the little graveyard with its flickering lamps, and then made a cautious traverse of a number of small fields each with its straw-covered

barn. Presently I was out on the downs, with the yellow levels of the Dancing Floor below me on the right. I was in a different mood from the previous night, for I was now miserably conscious of the shortness of our time and the bigness of our task. Anxiety was putting me into a fever of impatience and self-contempt. Here was I, a man who was reckoned pretty competent by the world, who had had a creditable record in the war, who was considered an expert at getting other people out of difficulties—and yet I was so far utterly foiled by a batch of barbarian peasants. I simply dared not allow my mind to dwell on Koré and her perils, for that way lay madness. I had to try to think of the thing objectively as a problem to be solved, but flashes of acute fear for the girl kept breaking through to set my heart beating.

I found Janni cooking supper by his little fire in a nook of the downs, and the homely sight for the moment comforted me. The one-armed corporal was, I dare say, by nature and upbringing as superstitious as any other Greek peasant, but his military training had canalised his imagination, and he would take no notice of a legend till he was ordered to by his superior officer. He reminded me of the policeman Javert in *Les Misérables*: his whole soul was in the ritual of his profession, and it must have been a black day for Janni when the war stopped. Maris, whom he worshipped blindly, had bidden him take instructions from me, and he was ready to follow me into the sea. Mercifully his service at Salonika had taught him a few English words and a certain amount of bad French, so we could more or less communicate.

He had supplies with him, so I had a second supper—biscuits and sardines and coffee, which after two days of starvation tasted like nectar and ambrosia. Also he had a quantity of caporal cigarettes with which I filled my pockets. Our first business was to get down to the beach, and fortunately he had already discovered a route a few hundred yards to the south, where a gully with a stone shoot led to the water's edge. Presently we stood on the pebbly shore looking out to the luminous west over a sea as calm as a mill-pond. I would have liked to bathe, but decided that I must first get the immediate business over.

That shore was rough going, for it was a succession of limestone reefs encumbered with great boulders which had come down from the rocks during past winters. The strip of beach was very narrow and the overhang of the cliffs protected us from observation from above, even had any peasant been daring enough to patrol the Dancing Floor by night. We kept close to the water where the way was easiest, but even there our progress was slow. It took us the better part of an hour to get abreast of the point where the wall ended. There the cliffs were at least two hundred feet high and smooth as the side of a cut loaf. Crowning them we could see the dark woodlands of the demesne.

My object was to find a route up them, and never in all my mountaineering experience had I seen a more hopeless proposition. The limestone seemed to have no fissures, and the faces had weathered smooth. In the Dolomites you can often climb a perpendicular cliff by the countless

little cracks in the hard stone, but here there were no cracks, only a surface glassy like marble. At one point I took off my boots and managed to ascend about twenty yards, when I was brought up sharp by an overhang, could find no way to traverse, and had my work cut out getting down again. Janni was no cragsman, and in any case his one arm made him useless.

Our outlook ahead was barred by a little cape, and I was in hopes that on the other side of that the ground might become easier. We had a bad time turning it, for the beach stopped and the rock fell sheer to the water. Happily the water at the point was shallow, and, partly wading and partly scrambling, we managed to make the passage. In the moonlight everything was clear as day, and once round we had a prospect of a narrow bay, backed by the same high perpendicular cliffs and bounded to the north by a still higher bluff which ended to seaward in a sheer precipice.

I sat down on a boulder with a sinking heart to consider the prospect. It was more hopeless than the part we had already prospected. There was no gully or chimney in the whole glimmering semicircle, nothing but a rim of unscalable stone crowned with a sharp-cut fringe of trees. Beyond the bluff lay the oliveyards which I had seen six years before when I landed from the yacht, but I was pretty certain that we would never get round the bluff. For the margin of shore had now disappeared, and the cliffs dropped sheer into deep water.

Suddenly Janni by my side grunted and pointed to the middle of the little bay. There, riding at anchor, was a boat.

At first it was not easy to distinguish it from a rock, for there was no riding light shown. But, as I stared at it, I saw that it was indeed a boat—a yawl-rigged craft of, I judged, about twenty tons. It lay there motionless in the moonlight, a beautiful thing which had no part in that setting of stone and sea—a foreign thing, an intruder. I watched it for five minutes and nothing moved aboard.

The sight filled me with both hope and mystification. Here was the “ship” which Maris had postulated. But who owned it and what was it doing in this outlandish spot, where there was no landing? It could not belong to Kynætho, or it would have been lying at the jetty below the House or in the usual harbour. Indeed it could not belong to Plakos at all, for, though I knew little about boats, I could see that the cut of this one spoke of Western Europe. Was anyone on board? It behoved me forthwith to find that out.

I spoke to Janni, and he whistled shrilly. But there was no answer from the sleeping bay. He tried again several times without result. If we were to make inquiries, it could only be by swimming out. Janni of course was no swimmer, and besides, the responsibility was on me. I can't say I liked the prospect, but in three minutes I had stripped and was striking out in the moon-silvered water.

The fresh cold aromatic sea gave me new vigour of body and mind. I realised that I must proceed warily. Supposing there was someone on board, someone hostile, I would be completely at his mercy. So I swam very softly up to the stern and tried to read the name on it. There was a name,

but that side was in shadow and I could not make it out. I swam to the bows and there again saw a name of which I could make nothing, except that the characters did not seem to me to be Greek.

I trod water and took stock of the situation. It was the kind of craft of which you will see hundreds at Harwich and Southampton and Plymouth—a pleasure boat, obviously meant for cruising, but with something of the delicate lines of a racer. I was beginning to feel chilly, and felt that I must do something more than prospect from the water. I must get on board and chance the boat being empty or the owner asleep.

There was a fender amidships hanging over the port side. I clutched this, got a grip of the gunwale, and was just about to pull myself up, when a face suddenly appeared above me, a scared, hairy face, surmounted by a sort of blue nightcap. Its owner objected to my appearance, for he swung a boathook and brought it down heavily on the knuckles of my left hand. That is to say, such was his intention, but he missed his aim and only grazed my little finger.

I dropped off and dived, for I was afraid that he might start shooting. When I came up a dozen yards off and shook the water out of my eyes, I saw him staring at me as if I was a merman, with the boathook still in his hand.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" I shouted, when I had ascertained that he had no pistol. "What boat is it? Who are you?"

My voice seemed to work some change in the situation, for he dropped the boathook, and replied

in what sounded like Greek. I caught one word "Ingleez" several times repeated.

"I'm English," I cried, "English . . . philos . . . philhellene—damn it, what's the Greek for a friend?"

"Friend," he repeated, "Ingleez," and I swam nearer.

He was a tough-looking fellow, dressed in a blue jersey and what appeared to be old flannel bags, and he looked honest, though puzzled. I was now just under him, and smiling for all I was worth. I put a hand on the fender again, and repeated the word "English." I also said that my intentions were of the best, and I only wanted to come abroad and have a chat. If he was well disposed toward England, I thought he might recognise the sound of the language.

Evidently he did, for he made no protest when I got both hands on the gunwale again. He allowed me to get my knee up on it, so I took my chance and swung myself over. He retreated a step and lifted the boathook, but he did not attempt to hit me as I arose like Proteus out of the sea and stood dripping on his deck.

I held out my hand, and with a moment's hesitation he took it. "English . . . friend," I said, grinning amicably at him, and to my relief he grinned back.

I was aboard a small yacht, which was occidental in every line of her, the clean decks, the general tidy workmanlike air. A man is not at his most confident standing stark naked at midnight in a strange boat, confronting somebody of whose speech he comprehends not one word. But I felt

that I had stumbled upon a priceless asset if I could only use it, and I was determined not to let the chance slip. He poured out a flow of Greek, at which I could only shake my head and murmur "English." Then I tried the language of signs, and went through a vigorous pantomime to explain that, though I could not speak his tongue, I had a friend on shore who could. The yacht had a dinghy. Would he row me ashore and meet my friend?

It took me the devil of a time to make this clear to him, and I had to lead him to where the dinghy lay astern, point to it, point to the shore, point to my dumb mouth and generally behave like a maniac. But he got it at last. He seemed to consider, then he dived below and returned with a thing like an iron mace, which he brandished round his head as if to give me to understand that if I misbehaved he could brain me. I smiled and nodded and put my hand on my heart, and he smiled back.

Then his whole manner changed. He brought me a coat and an ancient felt hat and made signs that I should put them on. He dived below again and brought up a bowl of hot cocoa which did me good, for my teeth were beginning to chatter. Finally he motioned me to get into the dinghy and set his mace beside him, took the sculls and pulled in the direction I indicated.

Janni was sitting smoking on a stone, the image of innocent peace. I cried out to him before we reached shore, and told him that this was the skipper and that he must talk to him. The two began their conversation before we landed, and

presently it seemed that Janni had convinced my host that we were respectable. As soon as we landed I started to put on my clothes, but first I took the pistol from my coat pocket and presented the butt-end to my new friend. He saw my intention, bowed ceremoniously, and handed it back to me. He also pitched the mace back into the dinghy, as if he regarded it as no longer necessary.

He and Janni talked volubly and with many gesticulations, and the latter now and then broke off to translate for my benefit. I noticed that, as time went on, the seaman's face, though it remained friendly, grew also obstinate.

"He says he awaits his master here," said Janni, "but who his master is and where he is gone he will not tell. He says also that this island is full of devils and bad men and that on no account will he stay on it."

I put suggestions to Janni, which he translated, but we could get nothing out of the fellow, except the repeated opinion—with which I agreed—that the island was full of devils and that the only place for an honest man was the water. About his master he remained stubbornly silent. I wanted him to take me in his boat round the farther bluff so that we could land on the oliveyard slopes and possibly get in touch with Maris, but he peremptorily refused. He would not leave the bay, which was the only safe place. Elsewhere were the men and women of Plakos, who were devils.

After about an hour's fruitless talk I gave it up. But one thing I settled. I told him through Janni that there were others besides ourselves and himself who were in danger from the devils of the island.

There was a lady—an English lady—who was even now in dire peril. If we could bring her to the spot would he be on the watch and take her on board?

He considered this for a little and then agreed. He would not leave the island without his master, but he would receive the lady if necessary, and if the devils followed he would resist them. He was obviously a fighting man, and I concluded he would be as good as his word. Asked if in case of pursuit he would put to sea, he said, "No, not till his master returned." That was the best I could make of him, but of that precious master he refused to speak a syllable. His own name he said was George—known at home as Black George, to distinguish him from a cousin, George of the Harelip.

We parted in obscure friendliness. I presented him with my empty cigarette-case, and he kissed me on both cheeks. As I handed him back the garments which he had lent me to cover my nakedness, I noticed a curious thing. The coat was an aquascutum so old that the maker's tab had long since gone from it. But inside the disreputable felt hat I saw the name of a well-known shop in Jermyn Street.

XXI: THE DANCING FLOOR

JANNI and I returned to the camp before dawn. For some unknown reason a heavy weariness overcame me on the way back, and I could scarcely drag my limbs over the last half-mile of shore and up the stone-shoot to the edge of the downs. I dropped on the ground beside the ashes of the fire, and slept like a drugged man.

When I woke it was high forenoon. The sun was beating full on the little hollow, and Janni was cooking breakfast. My lethargy had gone and I woke to a violent anxious energy. Where was Maris? He ought to have rejoined us, according to plan, before sunrise. But Janni had seen no sign of him. Had he got into the House? Well, in that case he would find means to send us a message, and to send it soon, for this was Good Friday, the day which the priest feared. I was in a fever of impatience, for I had found a boat, a means of escape of which Maris did not know. If he was in the House, I must get that knowledge to him, and he in turn must get in touch as soon as possible with me. Our forces were divided, with no link of communication.

I did my best to possess my soul in that hot scented forenoon, but it was a hard job, for the sense of shortening time had got on my nerves. The place was cooled by light winds from the sea, and for Janni, who lay on his back and consumed cigarettes, it was doubtless a pleasant habitation. Rivers of narcissus and iris and anemone flooded over the crest and spilled into the hollow. The ground was warm under the short herbage, and from it came the rich clean savour of earth quickening after its winter sleep under the spell of the sun. The pigeons were cooing in the cliffs below me, and the air was full of the soft tideless swaying of the sea. But for all the comfort it gave me I might have been stretched on frozen bricks in a dungeon. I was constantly getting up and crawling to a high point which gave me a view of the rim of the downs up to the wall, and eastwards towards the Vano

road. But there was no sign of Maris in the wide landscape.

About one o'clock the thing became unbearable. If Maris was in the House I must find touch with him. If he had failed, I must make the attempt myself. It was a crazy thing to contemplate in broad daylight, but my anxiety would not let me stay still. I bade Janni wait for me, and set off towards the Vano road, with the intention of trying Maris's route of the previous night and making a circuit by the east side of the village toward the jetty.

I had the sense to keep on the south side of the ridge out of sight of the Dancing Floor and the high ground beyond it. There was not a soul to be seen in all that grassy place ; the winding highway showed no figure as far as the eye could reach ; even the closes and barns clustered about the foot of the Dancing Floor seemed untenanted of man or beast. I gave the village a wide berth, and after crossing some patches of cultivation and scrambling through several ragged thickets found myself due east of Kynætho and some three hundred feet above it.

There I had the prospect of the church rising above a line of hovels, a bit of the main street, the rear of the inn, and the houses which straggled seaward toward the jetty. The place had undergone another transformation, for it seemed to be deserted. Not one solitary figure appeared in the blinding white street. Everyone must be indoors engaged in some solemn preparation against the coming night. That gave me a hope that the northern approaches to the House might be

unguarded. So great was my anxiety that I set off at a run, and presently had reached the high ground which overlooked the road from the village to the harbour. Here I had to go circumspectly, for once I descended to the road I would be in view of anyone on the jetty, and probably, too, of the northernmost houses in the village.

I scanned the foreground long and carefully with my glass, and decided that no one was about, so I slipped down from the heights, crossed the road a hundred yards above the harbour, and dived into the scrub which bordered the beach on the farther side. Here I was completely sheltered, and made good going till I rounded a little point and came into a scene which was familiar. It was the place where six years before Vernon and I had landed from Lamancha's yacht. There were the closes of fruit blossom, the thickets, the long scrubby ravine where we had listened to the Spring Song. I had a sudden sense of things being predestined, of the ironical fore-ordination of life.

I knew what to expect. Round the horn of the little bay where I stood lay the House with its jetty and the causeway and the steep stairs to the postern gates. My success thus far had made me confident and I covered the next half-mile as if I were walking on my own estate. But I had the wit to move cautiously before I passed the containing ridge, and crept up to the skyline.

It was well that I did so, for this was what I saw. On the jetty there were guards, and there were posts along the causeway. More, some change had been wrought in the seaward wall of the House.

The huge place rose, blank and white, in its cincture of greenery, but at the points where the steps ended in postern doors there seemed to be a great accumulation of brushwood which was not the work of nature. My glass told me what it was. The entrance was piled high with faggots. The place had been transformed into a pyre.

But it was not that sight which sent my heart to my boots—I had been prepared for that or any other devilry; it was the utter impossibility of effecting an entrance. The fabric rose stark and silent like a prison, and round it stood the warders.

I didn't wait long, for the spectacle made me mad. I turned and retraced my steps, as fast as I could drag my legs, for every ounce of vigour had gone out of me. It was a dull listless automaton that recrossed the harbour road, made the long circuit east of the village, and regained the downs beyond the Dancing Floor. When I staggered into camp, where the placid Janni was playing dice, it was close on five o'clock.

I made myself a cup of tea and tried to piece the situation together. Maris could not have entered the House—the thing was flatly impossible, and what had happened to him I could only guess. Where he had failed I certainly could not succeed, for the cliffs, the wall and the guards shut it off impenetrably from the world. Inside was Koré alone—I wondered if the old servant whom she had called Mitri was with her, or the French maid she had had in London—and that night would see the beginning of the end. The remembrance of the faggots piled about the door sent a horrid chill to my heart. The situation had marched clean

outside human power to control it. I thought with scorn of my self-confidence. I had grievously muddled every detail, and was of as little value as if I had remained in my Temple chambers. Pity and fear for the girl made me clench my hands and gnaw my lips. I could not stay still. I decided once more to prospect the line of the cliffs.

One-armed Janni was no use, so I left him behind. I slid down the stone-shoot and in the first cool of evening scrambled along that arduous shore. When I had passed the abutment of the wall I scanned with my glass every crack in the cliffs, but in daylight they looked even more hopeless than under the moon. At one place a shallow gully permitted me to reach a shelf, but there I stuck fast, for the rock above could only have been climbed by a hanging rope. The most desperate man—and by that time I was pretty desperate—could not find a way where the Almighty had decided that there should be none. I think that if there had been the faintest chance I would have taken it, in spite of the risks ; I would have ventured on a course which at Chamonix or Cortina would have been pronounced suicidal ; but here there was not even the rudiments of a course—nothing but that maddening glassy wall.

By and by I reached the cape beyond which lay the hidden bay and Black George with his boat. It occurred to me that I had not prospected very carefully the cliffs in this bay, and in any case I wanted to look again at the boat, that single frail link we had with the outer world. But first I stripped and had a bathe, which did something to cool the fret of my nerves. Then I waded

round the point to the place where Janni and I had talked with the seaman.

Black George had gone. There was not a trace of him or the boat in the shining inlet into which the westering sun was pouring its yellow light. What on earth had happened? Had his mysterious master returned? Or had he been driven off by the islanders? Or had he simply grown bored and sailed away? The last solution I dismissed: Black George, I was convinced, was no quitter.

The loss of him was the last straw to my hopelessness. I was faced with a situation with which no ingenuity or fortitude could grapple—only some inhuman skill in acrobatics or some Berserker physical powers which I did not possess. I turned my glass listlessly on the cliffs which lined the bay. There was nothing to be done there. They were as sheer as those I had already prospected, and, although more rugged and broken, it was by means of great noses of smooth rock on which only a fly could move.

I was sitting on the very boulder which Janni had occupied the night before, and I saw on the shingle one or two of his cigarette stumps. And then I saw something else.

It was a cigarette end, but not one of Janni's caporals. Moreover it had been dropped there during the past day. Janni's stumps, having been exposed to the night dews, were crumpled and withered; this was intact, the butt end of an Egyptian cigarette of a good English brand. Black George must have been here in the course of the day. But I remembered that Black George had smoked a peculiarly evil type of Greek tobacco.

Perhaps he had been pilfering his master's cigarettes? Or perhaps his master had come back?

I remembered that he had refused to utter one word about that master of his. Who could he be? Was he an Englishman? He might well be, judging from Black George's reverence for the word "English." If so, what was he doing in Plakos, and how had he reached this spot, unless he had the wings of a bird? If he had come along the downs and the shore Janni would have seen him. . . . Anyhow, he was gone now, and our one bridge with a sane world was broken.

I made my way back to Janni with a feeling that I had come to the edge of things and would presently be required to go over the brink. I was now quite alone—as much alone as Koré—and fate might soon link these lonelinesses. I had had this feeling once or twice in the war—that I was faced with something so insane that insanity was the only course for me, but I had no notion what form the insanity would take, for I still saw nothing before me but helplessness. I was determined somehow to break the barrier, regardless of the issue. Every scrap of manhood in me revolted against my futility. In that moment I became primitive man again. Even if the woman were not my woman she was of my own totem, and whatever her fate might be she should not meet it alone.

Janni had food ready for me, but I could not eat it. I took out my pistol, cleaned and reloaded it, and told Janni to look to his. I am not much of a pistol shot, but Janni, as I knew from Maris, was an expert. There would be something astir

when the moon rose, and I had an intuition that the scene would be the Dancing Floor. The seaward end of the House might be the vital point in the last stage of the drama, but I was convinced that the Dancing Floor would see the first act. It was the holy ground, and I had gathered from the priest that some dark ritual would take the place of the Good Friday solemnity.

There was only one spot where Janni and I might safely lie hidden, and at the same time look down on the Dancing Floor, and that was in the shadow of the wall between the guarded breach and the cliffs. There were large trees there and the progress of the moon would not light it up, whereas everywhere else would be clear as noonday. Moreover it was the strategic point, for whatever mischief was intended against the House would pass through the breach and therefore under our eyes. But it was necessary to get there before the moon was fully risen, for otherwise to men coming from the village we should be silhouetted against the cliff edge. I cut Janni's supper short and we started out, using every crinkle of the ground as cover, much as stalkers do when they are fetching a circuit and know that the deer are alarmed and watchful.

We had not much more than a mile to go, and by the route we chose we managed, as it happened, to keep wholly out of sight of the Dancing Floor. Janni—no mountaineer—grumbled at my pace, for I had acquired an extraordinary lightness of limb so that I felt as if I could have flown. I was puzzled to explain this, after my listlessness of the day, but I think it was due partly to tense

nerves and partly to the magic of the evening. The air was cool and exhilarating, and when the moon rose with a sudden glory above the House it was as tonic as if one had plunged into water. . . . Soon we were on the edge of the inky belt of shadow and moving eastward to get nearer the breach. But now I noticed something I had forgotten. The wall curved outward, and beyond that bulge—a couple of hundred yards from the breach—the light flooded to the very edge of the stone. We came to a halt at the apex of the curve, flat on our faces, and I turned to reconnoitre the Dancing Floor.

I wish to Heaven that I had the gift of words. It is too much to ask a man whose life has been spent in drawing pleadings and in writing dull legal opinions to describe a scene which needs the tongue or pen of a poet. For the Dancing Floor was transfigured. Its lonely beauty had been decked and adorned, as an altar is draped for high festival. On both slopes people clustered, men, women and children, all so silent that I thought I could hear them breathe. I thought, too, that they mostly wore white—at any rate the moonlight gave me the impression of an immense white multitude, all Kynætho and doubtless half the hills. The valley was marked out like a race-course. There seemed to be posts at regular intervals in a broad oval, and at each post was a red flicker which meant torches. The desert had become populous, and the solitary places blossomed with roses of fire.

The people were clustered toward the upper end, making an amphitheatre of which the arena

was the Dancing Floor, and the entrance to the stage the breach in the wall of the House. I saw that this entrance was guarded, not as before by three sentries, but by a double line of men who kept an avenue open between them. Beyond the spectators and round the arena was the circle of posts, and between them lay the Dancing Floor, golden in the moon, and flanked at its circumference by the angry crimson of the torches. I noticed another thing. Not quite in the centre but well within the arena was a solitary figure waiting. He was in white—gleaming white, and, so far as I could judge, he was standing beside the spring from which I had drunk the night before.

I have set out the details of what I saw, but they are only the beggarly elements, for I cannot hope to reproduce the strangeness which caught at the heart and laid a spell on the mind. The place was no more the Valley of the Shadow of Life, but Life itself—a surge of dæmonic energy out of the deeps of the past. It was wild and yet ordered, savage and yet sacramental, the home of an ancient knowledge which shattered for me the modern world and left me gasping like a cave-man before his mysteries. The magic smote on my brain, though I struggled against it. The passionless moonlight and the passionate torches—that, I think, was the final miracle—a marrying of the eternal cycle of nature with the fantasies of man.

The effect on Janni was overwhelming. He lay and gibbered prayers with eyes as terrified as a deer's, and I realised that I need not look for help in that quarter. But I scarcely thought of

him, for my trouble was with myself. Most people would call me a solid fellow, with a hard head and a close-texture mind, but if they had seen me then they would have changed their view. I was struggling with something which I had never known before, a mixture of fear, abasement and a crazy desire to worship. Yes—to worship. There was that in the scene which wakened some ancient instinct, so that I felt it in me to join the votaries.

It took me a little time to pull myself together. I looked up at the dome of the sky, where on the horizon pale stars were showing. The whole world seemed hard and gem-like and unrelenting. There was no help there. Nature approved this ritual. And then a picture flashed into my mind which enabled me to recover my wits. It was the carved Christ lying in its shroud on the bier in the deserted church. I am not a religious man in the ordinary sense—only a half-believer in the creed in which I was born. But in that moment I realised that there was that in me which was stronger than the pagan, an instinct which had come down to me from believing generations. I understood then what were my gods. I think I prayed. I know that I clung to the memory of that rude image as a Christian martyr may have clung to his crucifix. It stood for all the broken lights which were in me as against this ancient charmed darkness.

I was steadier now and with returning sanity came the power of practical thought. Something, some one, was to be brought from the House. Was there to be a trial in that arena? Or a sacrifice? No—I was clear that to-night was only the preparation, and that the great day was the morrow.

There was no sound from the gathering. I could not see the faces, but I knew that every one, down to the smallest child, was awed and rapt and expectant. No crowd, hushing its breath in the decisive moments of a great match, was ever more rigidly on the stretch. The very air quivered with expectation.

Then a movement began. Figures entered the arena at the end farthest from me—men, young men, naked I thought at first, till my glass showed me that each wore a sort of loin-cloth or it may have been short drawers. . . . They aligned themselves, like runners at the start of a race, and still there was no sound. The figure who had been standing by the well was now beside them and seemed to be speaking softly. Each held himself tense, with clenched hands, and his eyes on the ground. Then came some kind of signal and they sprang forward.

It was a race—such a race as few men can have witnessed. The slim youths kept outside the torches, and circled the arena of the Dancing Floor. Over the moonlit sward they flew, glimmering like ghosts—once round, a second time round. And all the while the crowd kept utter silence.

I ran the mile myself at school and college, and know something about pace. I could see that it was going to be a close finish. One man I noted, I think the very fellow who had hunted me into the church—he ran superbly and won a lead at the start. But the second time round I fancied another, a taller and leaner man who had kept well back in the first round, and was slowly creeping ahead. I liked his style, which was oddly like

the kind of thing we cultivate at home, and he ran with judgment too. Soon he was abreast of the first man, and then he sprinted and took the lead. I was wondering where the finish would be, when he snatched a torch from one of the posts, ran strongly up the centre of the Dancing Floor and plunged the flame in the spring.

Still there was no sound from the crowd. The winner stood with his head bent, a noble figure of youth who might have stepped from a Parthenon frieze. The others had gone ; he stood close beside the well with the white-clad figure who had acted as master of ceremonies—only now the victor in the race seemed to be the true master, on whom all eyes waited.

The sight was so strange and beautiful that I watched it half in a trance. I seemed to have seen it all before, and to know the stages that would follow. . . . Yes, I was right. There was a movement from the crowd and a man was brought forward. I knew the man, though he wore nothing but pants and a torn shirt. One could not mistake the trim figure of Maris, or his alert bird-like head.

He stood confronting the beautiful young barbarian beside the spring, looking very much as if he would like to make a fight of it. And then the latter seemed to speak to him, and to lay a hand on his head. Maris submitted, and the next I saw was that the runner had drawn a jar of water from the well and was pouring it over him. He held it high in his arms and the water wavered and glittered in the moonshine ; I could see Maris spluttering and wringing out his wet shirt-sleeves.

With that, recollection flooded in on me. This

was the ceremonial of which Vernon had read to me from Koré's manuscript. A virgin and a youth were chosen and set apart in a hallowed place, and the chooser was he who was victor in a race and was called the King. The victims were hallowed with water from the well by the white cypress. I was looking at the well, though the cypress had long since disappeared. I was looking at the King, and at one of those dedicated to the sacrifice. The other was the girl in the House. . . . Vernon had said that if we knew what the word *hosiotheis* meant we should know a good deal about Greek religion. That awful knowledge was now mine.

It was as I expected. The consecrator and the consecrated were moving, still in the same hushed silence, towards the *horkos*—the sanctuary. The torches had been extinguished as soon as the victor plunged his in the spring, and the pure light of the moon seemed to have waxed to an unearthly brightness. The two men walked up the slope of the Dancing Floor to the line of guards which led to the breach in the wall. I could not hold my glass because of the trembling of my hands, but I could see the figures plainly—the tall runner, his figure poised like some young Apollo of the great age of art, his face dark with the sun but the skin of his body curiously white. Some youth of the hills, doubtless—his crisp hair seemed in the moonlight to be flaxen. Beside him went the shorter Maris, flushed and truculent. He must have been captured by the guards in his attempt on the House, and as a stranger and also a Greek had been put forward as the male victim.

I was roused by the behaviour of Janni. He had realised that his beloved *capitaine* was a prisoner, towards whom some evil was doubtless intended, and this understanding had driven out his fear and revived his military instincts. He was cursing fiercely and had got out his pistol.

"Sir," he whispered to me, "I can crawl within shot, for the shadow is lengthening, and put a bullet into yon bandit. Then in the confusion my *capitaine* will escape and join us and break for the cliffs. These people are sheep and may not follow."

For a second it appeared to me the only thing to do. This evil Adonis was about to enter the House, and on the morrow Koré and Maris would find death at his hands, for he was the sacrificer. I seemed to see in his arrogant beauty the cruelty of an elder world. His death would at any rate shatter the ritual.

And then I hesitated and gripped Janni firmly by his one arm. For, as the two men passed out of my sight towards the breach in the wall, I had caught a glimpse of Maris's face. He was speaking to his companion, and his expression was not of despair and terror, but confident, almost cheerful. For an instant the life of the young runner hung on a thread, for I do not think that Janni would have missed. Then I decided against the shot, for I felt that it was a counsel of despair. There was something which I did not comprehend, for Maris's face had given me a glimmer of hope.

I signed to Janni and we started crawling back towards the cliffs. In that hour the one thing that kept me sane was the image of the dead Christ

below the chancel step. It was my only link with the reasonable and kindly world I had lost.

XXII: I ENTER THE SANCTUARY

I HAD only one impulse at that moment—an overwhelming desire to get back to the church and look again at the figure on the bier. It seemed to me the sole anchor in the confusion of uncharted tides, the solitary hope in a desert of perplexities. I had seen ancient magic revive and carry captive the hearts of a people. I had myself felt its compelling power. A girl whom I loved and a man who was my companion were imprisoned and at the mercy of a maddened populace. Maris was, like Ulysses, an old campaigner and a fellow of many wiles, but what could Maris do in the face of multitudes? An unhallowed epiphany was looked for, but first must come the sacrifice. There was no help in the arm of flesh, and the shallow sophistication of the modern world fell from me like a useless cloak. I was back in my childhood's faith, and wanted to be at my childhood's prayers.

As for Janni he had a single idea in his head, to follow his captain into the House and strike a blow for him, and as he padded along the seaward cliffs he doubtless thought we were bent on attacking the place from another side. We took pretty much the road I had taken in the morning, skirting the Dancing Floor on its southern edge. One strange thing I saw. The Dancing Floor was still thronged, though a space was kept clear in the centre round the well. Clearly it was no longer *tabu*, but a place of holiday. Moreover the people seemed to intend

to remain there, for they had lit fires and were squatting round them, while some had already stretched themselves to sleep. Kynætho had moved in a body to the scene of the sacrament.

When we reached the fringe of the village I saw that I had guessed correctly. There was not a sign of life in the streets. We walked boldly into the central square, and it might have been a graveyard. Moreover, in the graveyard itself the lamps by the graves had not been lit. Vampires were apparently no longer to be feared, and that struck me as an ill omen. Keats's lines came into my head about the "little town by river or sea shore" which is "emptied of its folk this pious morn." Pious morn!

And then above us, from the squat campanile, a bell began to toll—raggedly, feebly, like the plaint of a child. Yet to me it was also a challenge.

The church was bright with moonshine. The curtains still shrouded the sanctuary, and there were no candles lit, nothing but the flickering lamps before the ikons. Below the chancel step lay the dark mass which contained the shrouded Christ. Janni, like myself, seemed to find comfort in being here. He knelt at a respectful distance from the bier and began to mutter prayers. I went forward and lifted the shroud. The moon coming through one of the windows gave the carved wood a ghastly semblance of real flesh, and I could not bear to look on it. I followed Janni's example and breathed incoherent prayers. I was bred a Calvinist, but in that moment I was not worshipping any graven image. My prayer was to be delivered from the idolatry of the heathen.

Love me says 12

Suddenly the priest was beside me. In one hand he held a lighted candle, and the other carried a censer. He seemed in no way surprised to see us, but there was that about him which made me catch my breath. The man had suddenly become enlarged and ennobled. All the weakness had gone out of the old face, all the languor and bewilderment out of the eyes, the shoulders had straightened, his beard was no longer like a goat's, but like a prophet's. He was as one possessed, a fanatic, a martyr.

He had forgotten that I knew no Greek, for he spoke rapidly words which sounded like a command. But Janni understood, and went forward obediently to the bier. Then I saw what he meant us to do. We were to take the place of the absent hierophants and carry the image of the dead Christ through the bounds of the village. The bier was light enough even for one-armed Janni to manage his share. The shroud was removed, he took the fore-end, and I the back, and behind the priest we marched out into the night.

The streets were deathly still, the cool night air was unruffled by wind, so that the candle burned steadily ; the golden dome of the sky was almost as bright as day. Along the white beaten road we went, and then into the rough cobbles of the main street. I noticed that though the houses were empty every house door was wide open. We passed the inn and came into the road to the harbour and to the cottage among fruit trees where I had first made inquiries. Then we turned up the hill where lay the main entrance to the House, past little silent untenanted crofts and

oliveyards which were all gleaming grey and silver. The old man moved slowly, swinging his censer, and intoning what I took to be a dirge in a voice no longer tremulous, but masterful and strong, and behind him Janni and I stumbled along bearing the symbol of man's salvation.

I had never been present at a Greek Good Friday celebration, but Koré had described it to me—the following crowds tortured with suspense, the awed kneeling women, the torches, the tears, the universal lamentation. Then the people sorrowed, not without hope, for their dead Saviour. But the ordinary ceremonial can never have been so marvellous as was our broken ritual that night. We were celebrating, but there were no votaries. The torches had gone to redden the Dancing Floor, sorrow had been exchanged for a guilty ecstasy, the worshippers were seeking another Saviour. Our rite was more than a commemoration, it was a defiance, and I felt like a man who carries a challenge to the enemy.

The moon had set and darkness had begun before we returned to the church. Both Janni and I were very weary before we laid down our burden in the vault below the nave, a place hewn out of the dry limestone rock. By the last flickering light of the candle I saw the priest standing at the head of the bier, his hands raised in supplication, his eyes bright and rapt and unseeing. He was repeating a litany in which a phrase constantly recurred. I could guess its meaning. It must have been "He will yet arise."

I slept till broad daylight in the priest's house on the priest's bed, while Janni snored on a pile

of sheepskins. Since Kynætho was deserted, there was no reason now for secrecy, since the whole place, and not the church only, had become a sanctuary. The aged woman who kept house for the priest gave us a breakfast of milk and bread, but we saw no sign of him, and I did not wish to return to the church and disturb his devotions. I wondered if I should ever see him again; it was a toss-up if I should ever see anybody again after this day of destiny. We had been partners in strange events and I could not leave him without some farewell, so I took the book of his which seemed to be most in use, put two English five-pound notes inside, and did my best in laboriously printed Latin to explain that this was a gift for the Church and to thank him and wish him well.

I did another thing, for I wrote out a short account of the position, saying that further information might be obtained from Ertzberger and Vernon Milburne. Anything might happen to-day, and I wanted to leave some record for my friends. I addressed the document under cover to the priest, and—again in Latin—begged him, should anything happen to me, to see that it reached the British Minister in Athens. That was about all I could do in the way of preparation, and I had a moment of grim amusement in thinking how strangely I, who since the war had seemed to be so secure and cosseted, had moved back to the razor-edge of life.

I have said that there was no need for secrecy, so we walked straight through the village towards the harbour. Janni had made a preliminary survey beyond the graveyard in the early morning,

and had reported that the people of Kynætho were still encamped around the Dancing Floor. The trouble would not begin till we approached the House, for it was certain that on that day of all days the guards would be vigilant. We were both of us wholly desperate. We simply had to get in, and to get in before the evening ; for that purpose anything, even wholesale homicide, was legitimate. But at the same time it would do no good to get caught, even if we succeeded in killing several of our captors.

I think I had a faint unreasonable hope that we should find the situation at the causeway more promising than it had appeared on the day before. But when—after a walk where we had seen no trace of man or beast—we came to the crest of the little cape beyond which lay the jetty and the House, I had a sad disillusionment. The place was thick with sentries. I saw the line of them along the causeway and at the head of the jetty ; moreover there seemed to be men working to the left of the House where there was a cluster of outbuildings descending to the shallow vale up which ran the road from the sea. My glass showed me what they were doing. They were piling more straw and brushwood, so that from the outbuildings, which were probably of wood and would burn like tinder, the flames might have easy access to the windows of the House. The altar was being duly prepared for the victim.

Long and carefully I prospected the ground. There was cover enough to take us down to within a few yards of the jetty. If I tried to cross it I should be within view of the people on the

causeway, and even if I got across unobserved there was the more or less open beach between the causeway and the sea. It was true that directly under the wall I should be out of sight of the causeway guards, but then again, though I could get shelter behind some of the boulders, I could not move far without being noticed by whoever chose to patrol the jetty. Nevertheless that was the only road for me, for my object was to get to the far end of the causeway, where before the cliffs began there were oliveyards and orchards, through which some route must be possible to the House.

I considered the left side of the picture, where the valley led upwards past the outbuildings. That way I could see no hope, for if I succeeded in passing the faggot-stackers I would only reach the confines of the main entrance to the demesne from Kynætho, which was certain to be the best warded of all.

I had also to consider what to do with Janni. He would be a useful ally if it came to a scrap, but a scrap would be futile against such numbers, and in stalking or climbing his lack of an arm would be a serious handicap. Besides, if our business was to escape observation, one man would be better than two. . . . But it was possible that he might create a diversion. Supposing he tried the road on the left up the valley and made himself conspicuous, he might draw off attention while I crossed the jetty and got under the lee of the causeway wall. That meant of course that one of us would be put out of action, but unless we tried something of the kind we should both fail.

I put the thing to him, as we lay among the

scrubby arbutus, and though he clearly did not like the proposal, since his notion was to manhandle somebody on Maris's behalf, he was too good a soldier not to see the sense of it. He pointed out various difficulties, and then shook his head like a dog and said that he agreed. For his own sake I forbade any shooting. If he were merely hunted and captured, it was unlikely that any harm would befall him. He could explain that he was one of the survey party who had lost the others, and at the worst he would be shut up temporarily in some barn. He might even find the means to make himself useful later in the day.

So it was settled that I should try to worm my way as near to the jetty as the cover would allow. He was to watch my movements and when he saw my hand raised three times he was to march boldly towards the jetty. I would not be able to see what was happening, so when he was pursued and started up the little valley he was to shout as if in alarm. That would be the signal to me that the sentry had left the jetty and that I might try to cross it.

I started out at once on my first stage. As I have said, the cover was good—boulders overgrown with heath and vines, and patches of arbutus and a very prickly thorn. I tried to behave as if I were on a Scots hill stalking alone, with deer where the sentries stood. It was not a very difficult passage, for my enemies had no eyes for the ground on my side, their business being to prevent egress from the House. After about half an hour's careful crawling, I found myself within six yards of the jetty looking through the tangle

to the rough masonry of it, with a sideways view of the point where it joined the causeway. I could see none of the guards, but I heard distinctly the sound of their speech. I had marked the spot where I now lay before I started, and knew it was within sight of Janni. So I straightened myself and thrice raised my arms above the scrub.

For a minute or two nothing happened. Janni must have started but had not yet attracted attention. I raised my body as far as I dared, but I could only see the shoreward end of the jetty—neither the jetty itself nor any part of the causeway. I waited for a cry, but there was no sound. Was Janni being suffered to make his way up the little valley unopposed?

Then suddenly a moving object flashed into my narrow orbit of vision. It must be one of the watchers from the causeway, and he was in a furious hurry—I could hear the scruff of his heelless boots on the dry stones as he turned a corner. . . . He must be in pursuit of Janni. . . . There would no doubt be others too at the job. Their silence might be a ritual business. *Favete linguis*, perhaps? If Janni shouted I never heard him.

I resolved to take the chance, and bolted out of cover to the jetty. In two bounds I was beyond it and among the gravel and weed of the farther beach. But in that short progress I saw enough of the landscape to know that I was undiscovered, that there was nobody on the causeway within sight, or at the mouth of the little glen. Janni had certainly been followed, and by this time was no doubt in the hands of the Philistines out of my ken.

I ran close under the lee of the sea-wall, and at first I had a wild hope of getting beyond the causeway into the region of the olive groves before the sentries returned. But some remnant of prudence made me halt and consider before I attempted the last open strip of beach. There I had a view of the bit of the causeway towards the jetty, and suddenly figures appeared on it, running figures, like men returning to duty after a hasty interlude. If I had moved another foot I should have been within view.

There was nothing for it but to wait where I was. I crouched in a little nook between a fallen boulder and the wall, with the weedy rim of the causeway six feet above me. Unless a man stood on the very edge and peered down I was safe from observation. But that was the sum of my blessings. I heard soft feet above me as the men returned to their posts, and I dared not move a yard. It was now about two in the afternoon; I had brought no food with me, though I found a couple of dusty figs in my pocket; the sun blazed on the white wall and the gravel of the shore till the place was like a bakehouse; I was hot and thirsty, and I might have been in the middle of the Sahara for all the chance of a drink. But the discomfort of my body was trivial compared with the disquiet of my mind.

For I found myself in a perfect fever of vexation and fear. The time was slipping past and the crisis was nigh, and yet, though this was now my fourth day on the island, I was not an inch farther forward than the hour I landed. My worst fears—nay, what had seemed to me mere crazy imaginings—

had been realised. I was tortured by the thought of Koré—her innocent audacities, her great-hearted courage, her loneliness, her wild graces. "Beauteous vain endeavour"—that was the phrase of some poet that haunted me and made me want to howl like a wolf. I realised now the meaning of a sacrifice and the horror of it. The remembrance of the slim victor in the race, beautiful and pitiless, made me half crazy. Movement in that place was nearly impossible, but it was utterly impossible that I should stay still. I began in short stages to worm my way along the foot of the wall.

I do not suppose that the heat of that April afternoon was anything much to complain of, but my fever of mind must have affected my body, for I felt that I had never been so scorched and baked in my life. There was not a scrap of shade, the rocks almost blistered the hand, the dust got into my throat and nose and made me furiously thirsty, and my head ached as if I had a sun-stroke. . . . The trouble was with the jetty and the watchers on it, for I was always in view of them. Had they detected a movement below the wall, a single glance would have revealed me. So I had to make my stages very short, and keep a wary outlook behind. . . . There seemed to be much astir on the jetty. Not only the guards, but other figures appeared on it, and I saw that they were carrying up something from a boat at anchor. That I think was what saved me. Had the sentries had nothing to do but to stare about them I must have been discovered, but the portage business kept them distracted.

The minutes seemed hours to my distraught mind, but I did indeed take an inconceivable time crawling along that grilling beach, with the cool sea water lapping not a dozen yards off to give point to my discomfort. When I reached the place where the causeway ceased, and long ribs of rock took the place of the boulders of the shore, I found by my watch that it was nearly six o'clock. The discovery put quicksilver into my weary limbs. Looking back I saw that I was out of sight of the jetty, and that a few yards would put me out of sight of the causeway. I wriggled into the cover of a bush of broom, lay on my back for a minute or two to rest, and then made for the shade of the oliveyards.

The place was weedy and neglected—I don't know anything about olive culture, but I could see that much. There was a wilderness of a white umbelliferous plant and masses of a thing like a spineless thistle. I pushed uphill among the trees, keeping well in the shade, with the west front of the House glimmering through the upper leaves at a much higher elevation. Above me I saw a deeper shadow which I took to be cypresses, and beyond them I guessed must lie the demesne. I hoped for a gate, and in any case expected no more than a hedge and a palisade.

Instead I found a wall. There was a door to be sure, but it was no use to me, for it was massive and locked. I might have known that Shelley Arabin would leave no part of his cursed refuge unbarricaded. I sat and blinked up at this new obstacle, and could have cried with exasperation. It seemed to run direct from the House to the edge

of the cliffs which began about a quarter of a mile to my right, and was an exact replica of the wall above the Dancing Floor.

I decided that it was no good trying it at the House end, for there I should certainly be in view of some of the guards. The masonry was comparatively new and very solid, and, since none of the olive trees grew within four yards of it, it was impossible to use them as a ladder. Already I felt the approach of night, for the sun was well down in the west and a great tide of sunset was flooding the sky. I do not think I have ever before felt so hopeless or so obstinate. I was determined to pass that wall by its abutment on the cliffs or break my neck in the effort.

My memory of the next hour is not very clear. All I know is that in the failing daylight I came to the cliffs' edge and found an abutment similar to the one at the Dancing Floor. Similar, but not the same. For here some storm had torn the masonry and it seemed to me that it might be passed. The rock fell steep and smooth to the sea, but that part which was the handiwork of man was ragged. I took off my boots and flung them over the wall, by way of a gage of battle, and then I started to make the traverse.

It was a slow and abominable business, but I do not think it would have been very difficult had the light been good, for the stone was hard enough and the cracks were many. But in that dim gloaming with a purple void beneath me, with a heart which would not beat steadily and a head which throbbed with pain, I found it very near the limit of my powers. I had to descend before

I could traverse, and the worst part was the ascent on the far side. I knew that, when I at last got a grip of a wind-twisted shrub and tried to draw myself over the brink, it needed every ounce of strength left in me. I managed it and lay gasping beside the roots of a great pine—inside the demesne at last.

When I got my breath I found that I had a view into the narrow cove where Janni and I had seen the boat. Black George had returned, and returned brazenly, for he was showing a riding light. A lantern swung from the mast, and, more, there was a glow from the cabin skylight. I wondered what was going on in the little craft, and I think the sight gave me a grain of comfort, till I realised that I was hopelessly cut off from Black George. What was the good of a link with the outer world, when unscalable walls and cliffs intervened—when at any moment murder might be the end of everything?

Murder—that was the word which filled my head as I pushed inland. I had never thought of it in that way, but of course I was out to prevent murder. To prevent it? More likely to share in it. . . . I had no plan of any kind, only a desire to be with Koré, so that she should not be alone. It was her loneliness that I could not bear. . . . And anyhow I had a pistol and I would not miss the runner. “The priest who slew the slayer and shall himself be slain”—the tag came unbidden to my lips. I think I must have been rather light-headed.

The last fires of the sunset did not penetrate far into the pine wood, the moon had not yet risen, and

as I ran I took many tosses, for the place was very dark. There were paths, but I neglected them, making straight for where I believed the House to lie. I was not exact in my course, for I bore too much to the right in the direction of the breach in the wall at the Dancing Floor. Soon I was among shrubberies in which rides had been cut, but there were still many tall trees to make darkness. I thought I saw to the right, beyond where the wall lay, a reddish glow. That would be the torches on the Dancing Floor where the people waited for the epiphany.

Suddenly on my left front a great blaze shot up to heaven. I knew it was the signal that the hour had come. The outbuildings had been fired, and the House would soon be in flames. The blaze wavered and waned, and then waxed to a mighty conflagration as the fire reached something specially inflammable. In a minute that wood was bright as with an obscene daylight. The tree trunks stood out black against a molten gold, which at times crimsoned and purpled in a devilish ecstasy of destruction.

I knew now where the House lay. I clutched my pistol, and ran down a broad path, with a horrid fear that I was too late after all. I ran blindly, and had just time to step aside to let two figures pass.

They were two of the guards—hillmen by their dress—and even in my absorption I wondered what had happened to them. For they were like men demented, with white faces and open mouths. One of them stumbled and fell, and seemed to stay on his knees for a second praying, till his

companion lugged him forward. I might have faced them with impunity, for their eyes were sightless. Never have I seen men suffering from an extremer terror.

The road twisted too much for my haste, so I cut across country. The surge and crackle of the flames filled the air, but it seemed as if I heard another sound, the sound of running feet, of bodies, many bodies, brushing through the thicket. I was close on the House now, and close on the road which led to it from the broken wall and the Dancing Floor. As I jumped a patch of scrub and the gloom lightened in the more open avenue, I bumped into another man and saw that it was Maris.

He was waiting, pistol in hand, beside the road, and in a trice had his gun at my head. Then he recognised me and lowered it. His face was as crazy as the hillmen's who had passed me, and he still wore nothing but breeches and a ragged shirt, but his wild eyes seemed to hold also a dancing humour.

"Blessed Jesu!" he whispered, "you have come in time. The fools are about to receive their Gods. You have your pistol? But I do not think there will be shooting."

He choked suddenly as if he had been struck dumb, and I too choked. For I looked with him up the avenue towards the burning House.

THE DANCING FLOOR PART III

XXIII: VERNON'S TALE

THIS part of the story (said Leithen) I can only give at second-hand. I have pieced it together as well as I could from what Vernon told me, but on many matters he was naturally not communicative, and about these I have had to guess for myself. . . .

Vernon left England the day after the talk with me which I have already recorded, sending his boat as deck cargo to Patras, while he followed by way of Venice. He had a notion that the great hour which was coming had best be met at sea, where he would be far from the distractions and littlenesses of life. He took one man with him, from Wyvenhoe, a lean gipsy lad called Martell, but the boy fell sick at Corfu and he was obliged to send him home. In his stead he found an Epirote with a string of names, who was strongly recommended to him by one of his colleagues in the old Ægean Secret Service. From Patras they made good sailing up the Gulf of Corinth, and, passing through the Canal, came in the last days of March to the Piræus. In that place of polyglot speech, whistling engines and the odour of gas-works, they delayed only for water and supplies, and presently had rounded Sunium, and were beating up the Euripus with the Attic hills rising sharp and clear in the spring sunlight.

He had no plans. It was a joy to him to be alone with the racing seas and the dancing winds, to scud past the little headlands, pink and white with blossom, or to lie of a night in some hidden bay beneath the thymy crags. He had discarded the clothes of civilisation. In a blue jersey and old corduroy trousers, bareheaded and barefooted, he steered his craft and waited on the passing of the hours. His mood, he has told me, was one of complete happiness, unshadowed by nervousness or doubt. The long preparation was almost at an end. Like an acolyte before a temple gate, he believed himself to be on the threshold of a new life. He had that sense of unseen hands which comes to all men once or twice in their lives, and both hope and fear were swallowed up in a calm expectancy.

Trouble began under the snows of Pelion as they turned the north end of Eubœa. On the morning of the first Monday in April the light winds died away, and foul weather came out of the north-west. By midday it was half a gale, and in those yeasty shallow seas, with an iron coast to port and starboard, their position was dangerous. The nearest harbour was twenty miles distant, and neither of the crew had ever been there before. With the evening the gale increased, and it was decided to get out of that maze of rocky islands to the safer deeps of the Ægean.

It was a hard night for the two of them, and there was no chance of sleep. More by luck than skill they escaped the butt of Skiathos, and the first light found them far to the south-east among the long tides of the North Ægean. They ran close-reefed before the gale, and all morning with

decks awash nosed and plunged in seas which might have been the wintry Atlantic. It was not till the afternoon that the gale seemed to blow itself out, and two soaked and chilly mortals could relax their vigil. Soon bacon was frizzling on the cuddy-stove, and hot coffee and dry clothes restored them to moderate comfort.

The sky cleared, and in bright sunlight, with the dregs of the gale behind him, Vernon steered for the nearest land, an island of which he did not trouble to read the name, but which the chart showed to possess good anchorage. Late in the evening, when the light was growing dim, they came into a little bay carved from the side of a hill. They also came into fog. The wind had dropped utterly, and the land which they saw was only an outline in the haze. When they cast anchor the fog was rolling like a tide over the sea, and muffling their yards. They spent a busy hour or two, repairing the damage of the storm, and then the two of them made such a meal as befits those who have faced danger together. Afterwards Vernon, as his custom was, sat alone in the stern, smoking and thinking his thoughts. He wrote up his diary with a ship's lantern beside him, while the mist hung about him low and soft as an awning.

He had leisure now for the thought which had all day been at the back of his mind. The night—the great night—had passed and there had been no dream. The adventure for which all his life he had been preparing himself had vanished into the *Ægean* tides. The hour when the revelation should have come had been spent in battling with

the storm, when a man lives in the minute at grips with too urgent realities.

His first mood was one of dismal relaxedness. He felt as useless as an unstrung bow. I, the only man to whom he had ever confided his secret, had been right, and the long vigil had ended in fiasco. He tried to tell himself that it was a relief, that an old folly was over, but he knew that deep down in his heart there was bitter disappointment. The fates had prepared the stage, and rung up the curtain, and lo! there was no play. He had been fooled, and somehow the zest and savour of life had gone from him. After all, no man can be strung high and then find his preparations idle without suffering a cruel recoil.

And then anger came to stiffen him—anger at himself. What a God-forsaken ass he had been, frittering away his best years in following a phantom! . . . In his revulsion he loathed the dream which he had cherished so long. He began to explain it away with the common sense which on my lips he had accounted blasphemy. . . . The regular seasonal occurrence was his own doing—he had expected it and it had come—a mere case of subjective compulsion. . . . The fact that each year the revelation had moved one room nearer was also the result of his willing it to be so, for subconsciously he must have desired to hasten the consummation. . . . He went through every detail, obstinately providing some rationalistic explanation for each. I do not think he can have satisfied himself, but he was in the mood to deface his idols, and one feeling surged above all others—that he was done with fancies now and for ever. He has

told me that the thing he longed for chiefly at that moment was to have me beside him that he might make formal recantation.

By and by he argued himself into some philosophy. He had dallied certain years, but he was still young and the world was before him. He had kept his body and mind in hard training, and that at any rate was not wasted, though the primal purpose had gone. He was a normal man now among normal men, and it was his business to prove himself. He thought in his Calvinistic way that the bogus vision might have been sent to him for a purpose—the thing might be hallucination, but the *ascesis* which it had entailed was solid gain. . . . He fetched from his locker the little book in which he had chronicled his inner life, and wrote in it "Finis." Then he locked it and flung the key overboard. The volume would be kept at Severns to remind him of his folly, but it would never be opened by him.

By this time he was his own master again. He would sail for England next morning and get hold of me and make a plan for his life.

He was now conscious for the first time of his strange environment. The boat was in a half-moon of bay in an island of which he had omitted to notice the name but whose latitude and longitude he roughly knew. The night was close around him like a shell, for the fog had grown thicker, though the moon behind it gave it an opaque sheen. It was an odd place in which to be facing a crisis. . . .

His thoughts ran fast ahead to the career which he must shape from the ruins of his dream. He

was too late for the Bar. Business might be the best course—he had big interests in the north of England which would secure him a footing, and he believed that he had the kind of mind for administration. . . . Or politics? There were many chances for a young man in the confused post-bellum world. . . .

He was absorbed in his meditations and did not hear the sound of oars or the grating of a boat alongside. Suddenly he found a face looking at him in the ring of lamplight—an old bearded face curiously wrinkled. The eyes, which were shrewd and troubled, scanned him for a second or two, and then a voice spoke :

“ Will the Signor come with me ? ” it said in French.

Vernon, amazed at this apparition which had come out of the mist, could only stare.

“ Will the Signor come with me ? ” the voice spoke again. “ We have grievous need of a man.”

Vernon unconsciously spoke not in French but in Greek.

“ Who the devil are you, and where do you come from ? ”

“ I come from the House. I saw you enter the bay before the fog fell. Had there been no fog, they would not have let me come to you.”

“ Who are ‘ they ’ ? ” Vernon asked.

But the old man shook his head. “ Come with me and I will tell you. It is a long story.”

“ But what do you want me to do ? Confound it, I’m not going off with a man I never saw before who can’t tell me what he wants.”

The old man shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

"I have no words," he said. "But Mademoiselle Élise is waiting at the jetty. Come to her at any rate and she will reason with you."

Vernon—as you will admit, if I have made his character at all clear to you—had no instinct for melodrama. He had nothing in him of the knight-errant looking for adventure, and this interruption out of the fog and the sea rather bored him than otherwise. But he was too young to be able to refuse such an appeal. He went below and fetched his revolver and an electric torch which he stuffed into a trouser pocket. He cried to the Epirote to expect him when he saw him, for he was going ashore.

"All right," he said. "I'll come and see what the trouble is."

He dropped over the yacht's side into the cockleshell of a boat, and the old man took up the sculls. The yacht must have anchored nearer land than he had thought, for in five minutes they had touched a shelving rock. Somebody stood there with a lantern which made a dull glow in the fog.

Vernon made out a middle-aged woman with the air and dress of a lady's maid. She held the lantern close to him for a moment, and then turned wearily to the other. "Fool, Mitri!" she cried. "You have brought a peasant."

"Nay," said the old man, "he is no peasant. He is a Signor, I tell you."

The woman again passed the light of her lantern over Vernon's face and figure. "His dress is a peasant's, but such clothes may be a nobleman's whim. I have heard it of the English."

"I am English," said Vernon in French.

She turned on him with a quick movement of relief.

"You are English . . . and a gentleman? But I know nothing of you . . . only that you have come out of the sea. Up in the House we women are alone, and my mistress has death to face, or worse than death. We have no claim on you, and if you give us your service it means danger—oh, what danger! See, the boat is there. You can return in it and go away, and forget that you have been near this accursed place. But, O Monsieur, if you hope for Heaven and have pity on a defenceless angel, you will not leave us."

Vernon's blood was slow to stir, and, as I have said, he had no instinct for melodrama. This gesticulating French maid was like something out of an indifferent play.

"Who is your mistress?" he asked. "Did she send you for me?"

The woman flung up her hands.

"I will speak the truth. My mistress does not know you are here. Only Mitri and I saw you. She will not ask help, for she is foolishly confident. She is proud and fearless, and will not believe the evidence of her eyes. She must be saved in spite of herself. I fear for her and also for myself, for the whole House is doomed."

"But, Mademoiselle, you cannot expect me to intrude uninvited on your mistress. What is her name? What do you want me to do?"

She clutched his arm and spoke low and rapidly in his ear.

"She is the last of her line, you must know—a girl with a wild estate and a father dead these

many months. She is good and gracious, as I can bear witness, but she is young and cannot govern the wolves who are the men of these parts. They have a long hatred of her house, and now they have it rumoured that she is a witch who blights the crops and slays the children. . . . Once, twice, they have cursed our threshold and made the blood mark on the door. We are prisoners now, you figure. They name her Basilissa, meaning the Queen of Hell, and there is no babe but will faint with fright if it casts eyes on her, and she as mild and innocent as Mother Mary. . . . The word has gone round to burn the witch out, for the winter has been cruel and they blame their sorrows on her. The hour is near, and unless salvation comes she will go to God in the fire."

There was something in the hoarse excited voice which forbade Vernon to dismiss lightly this extraordinary tale. The woman was patently terrified and sincere. It might be a trap, but he had his pistol, and from an old man and a woman he had nothing to fear. On the other hand there might be some desperate need which he could not disregard. It seemed to him that he was bound to inquire further.

"I am willing to go to your mistress," he said, and the woman, murmuring "God's mercy," led the way up a steep causeway to some rocky steps cut in a tamarisk thicket.

She stopped half-way to whisper an injunction to go quietly. "They cannot see us in this blessed fog," she whispered, "but they may hear us." Then to Vernon: "They watch us like wild beasts, Monsieur; their sentries do not permit us to leave

the House, but this night the kind God has fooled them. But they cannot be far off, and they have quick ears."

The three crept up the rock staircase made slippery by the heavy mist. Presently a great wall of masonry rose above them, and what seemed the aperture of a door. "Once," the woman whispered, "there were three such posterns, but two were walled up by my lady's father—walled up within, with the doors left standing. This our enemies do not know and they watch all three, but this the least, for it looks unused. Behold their work!"

Vernon saw that tall bundles of brushwood had been laid around the door, and that these had with difficulty been pushed back when it was opened.

"But what . . . ?" he began.

"It means that they would burn us," she hissed. "Now, Monsieur, do you believe my tale, and, believing, does your courage fail you?"

To Vernon, shy, placid, a devotee of all the conventions, it was beginning to seem a monstrous thing to enter this strange house at the bidding of two servants, primed with a crazy tale, to meet an owner who had given no sign of desiring his presence. A woman, too—apparently a young woman. The thing was hideously embarrassing, the more so as he suddenly realised that he was barefooted, and clad in his old jersey and corduroys. I think he would have drawn back except for the sight of the faggots—that and the woman's challenge to his courage. He had been "dared" like a schoolboy, and, after twenty-four hours fighting with storms and the shattering of the purpose of

a lifetime, he was in that half-truculent, half-reckless mood which is prone to accept a challenge. There was business afoot, it appeared, ugly business.

"Go on. I will see your mistress," he said.

With a key the old man unlocked the door. The lock must have been recently oiled, for it moved easily. The three now climbed a staircase which seemed to follow the wall of a round tower. Presently they came into a stone hall with ancient hangings like the banners in a church. From the open frame of the lantern a second was kindled, and the two lights showed a huge desolate place with crumbling mosaics on the floor and plaster dropping from the walls and cornices. There was no furniture of any kind and the air smelt damp and chilly like a vault.

"These are unused chambers," the woman said, and her voice was no longer hushed but high-pitched with excitement. "We live only on the landward side."

Another heavy door was unlocked, and they entered a corridor where the air blew warmer, and there was a hint of that indescribable scent which comes from human habitation. The woman stopped and consulted in whispers with the old man. Now that she had got Vernon inside, her nervousness seemed to have increased. She turned to him at last :

"I must prepare my mistress. If Monsieur will be so good he will wait here till I fetch him."

She opened a door and almost pushed Vernon within. He found himself in black darkness, while the flicker of the lantern vanished round a bend in the corridor.

XXIV: YOUTH AND MAID

FROM his pocket Vernon drew his electric torch and flashed it round the room in which he found himself. It was the extreme opposite of the empty stone hall, for it was heavily decorated and crowded with furniture. Clearly no one had used it lately, for dust lay on everything and the shutters of the windows had not been unbarred for months. It had the air, indeed, of a lumber-room, into which furniture had been casually shot. The pieces were for the most part fine and costly. There were several Spanish cabinets, a wonderful red-lacquer couch, quantities of Oriental rugs which looked good, and a litter of Chinese vases and antique silver lamps.

But it was not the junk which filled it that caught Vernon's eye. It was the walls, which had been painted and frescoed in one continuous picture. At first he thought it was a Procession of the Hours or the Seasons, but when he brought his torch to bear on it he saw that it was something very different. The background was a mountain glade, and on the lawns and beside the pools of a stream, figures were engaged in wild dances. Pan and his satyrs were there, and a bevy of nymphs, and strange figures half animal, half human. The thing was done with immense skill—the slanted eyes of the fauns, the leer in a contorted satyr face, the mingled lust and terror of the nymphs, the horrid obscenity of the movements. It was a carnival of bestiality that stared from the four walls. The man who conceived it had worshipped darker gods than Priapus.

There were other things which Vernon noted in the jumble of the room. A head of Aphrodite, for instance—Pandemos, not Urania. A broken statuette of a boy which made him sick. A group of little figures which were a miracle in the imaginative degradation of the human form. Not the worst relics from the lupanars of Pompeii compared with these in sheer subtlety of filth. And all this in a shuttered room stifling with mould and disuse.

There was a door at the farther end which he found unlocked. The room beyond was like a mortuary—the walls painted black and undecorated save for one small picture. There was a crack in the shutters here, and perhaps a broken window, for a breath of the clean sea air met him. There was no furniture except an oblong piece of yellow marble which seemed from the rams' heads and cornucopias to be an old altar. He turned his torch on the solitary picture. It represented the stock scene of Salome with the head of John the Baptist, a subject which bad artists have made play with for the last five hundred years. But this was none of the customary daubs, but the work of a master—a perverted, perhaps a crazy, genius. The woman's gloating face, the passion of the hands caressing the pale flesh, the stare of the dead eyes, were wonderful and awful. If the first room had been the shrine of inhuman lust, this had been the chapel of inhuman cruelty.

He opened another door and found himself in a little closet, lined to the ceiling with books. He knew what he would find on the shelves. The volumes were finely bound, chiefly in vellum, and among them were a certain number of reputable

classics. But most belonged to the backstairs of literature—the obscenities of Greek and of silver Latin, the diseased sidewalks of the Middle Ages, the aberrations of the moderns. It was not common pornography ; the collection had been made by some one who was a scholar in vice.

Vernon went back to the first room, nauseated and angry. He must get out of this damned place, which was, or had been, the habitation of devils. What kind of owner could such a house possess ? The woman had said that it was a young girl, as virtuous as the Virgin. But, great God ! how could virtue dwell in such an environment ?

He had opened the door to begin his retreat when a lantern appeared in the corridor. It was the woman, and with a finger on her lips she motioned him back into the room.

“ My mistress is asleep,” she said, “ and it would not be well to wake her. Monsieur will stay here to-night and speak with her in the morning ? ”

“ I will do nothing of the kind,” said Vernon. “ I am going back to my boat.”

The woman caught his involuntary glance at the wall paintings and clutched his arm. “ But that is not her doing,” she cried. “ That was the work of her father, who was beyond belief wicked. It is his sins that the child is about to expiate. The people have condemned her, but you surely would not join in their unjust judgment.”

“ I tell you I will have nothing to do with the place. Will you kindly show me the way back ? ”

Her face hardened. “ I cannot. Mitri has the key.”

“ Well, where the devil is Mitri ? ”

“ I will not tell . . . O Monsieur, I beseech you,

do not forsake us. There has been evil in this House enough to sink it to hell, but my mistress is innocent. I ask only that you speak with her. After that, if you so decide, you can go away."

The woman was plainly honest and in earnest, and Vernon was a just man. He suddenly felt that he was behaving badly. There could be no harm in sleeping a night in the house, and in the morning interviewing its owner. If it was a case of real necessity he could take her and her maid off in his boat. . . . After all there might be serious trouble afoot. The sight of those hideous rooms had given him a sharp realisation of the ugly things in life.

He was taken to a clean, bare little attic at the top of the house which had once no doubt been a servant's quarters. Having been up all the previous night, his head had scarcely touched the rough pillow before he was asleep. He slept for ten hours, till he was awakened by Mitri, who brought him hot water and soap and a venerable razor with which he made some attempt at a toilet. He noticed that the fog was still thick, and from the garret window he looked into an opaque blanket.

He had wakened with a different attitude towards the adventure in which he found himself. The sense of a wasted youth and defrauded hopes had left him; he felt more tightly strung, more vigorous, younger; he also felt a certain curiosity about this Greek girl who in an abominable house was defying the lightnings.

Mitri conducted him to the first floor, where he was taken charge of by the Frenchwoman.

"Do not be afraid of her," she whispered.

"Deal with her as a man with a woman and make her do your bidding. She is stiff-necked towards me, but she may listen to a young man, especially if he be English."

She ushered Vernon into a room which was very different from the hideous chambers he had explored the night before. It was poorly and sparsely furnished, the chairs were chiefly wicker, the walls had recently been distempered by an amateur hand, the floor was of bare scrubbed boards. But a bright fire burned on the hearth, there was a big bunch of narcissus on a table set for breakfast, and flowering branches had been stuck in the tall vases beside the chimney. Through the open window came a drift of fog which intensified the comfort of the fire.

It was a woman's room, for on a table lay some knitting and a piece of embroidery, and a small ivory housewife's case bearing the initials "K. A." There were one or two books also, and Vernon looked at them curiously. One was a book of poems which had been published in London a month before. This Greek girl must know English; perhaps she had recently been in England. . . . He took up another volume, and to his amazement it was a reprint of Peter Beckford's *Thoughts on Hunting*. He could not have been more surprised if he had found a copy of the *Eton Chronicle*. What on earth was the mistress of a lonely Ægean island doing with Peter Beckford?

The fire crackled cheerfully, the raw morning air flowed through the window, and Vernon cast longing eyes on the simple preparations for breakfast. He was ferociously hungry, and he wished

he were now in the boat, where the Epirote would be frying bacon. . . .

There was another door besides that by which he had entered, and curiously enough it was in the same position as the door in the room of his dream. He angrily dismissed the memory of that preposterous hallucination, but he kept his eye on the door. By it no doubt the mistress of the house would enter, and he wished she would make haste. He was beginning to be very curious about this girl. . . . Probably she would be indignant and send him about his business, but she could scarcely refuse to give him breakfast first. In any case there was the yacht. . . . There was a mirror above the mantelpiece in which he caught a glimpse of himself. The glimpse was not reassuring. His face was as dark as an Indian's, his hair wanted cutting, and his blue jersey was bleached and discoloured with salt water. He looked like a deck-hand on a cargo boat. But perhaps a girl who read Beckford would not be pedantic about appearances. He put his trust in Peter——

The door had opened. A voice, sharp-pitched and startled, was speaking, and to his surprise it spoke in English.

“Who the devil are you?” it said.

He saw a slim girl, who stood in the entrance poised like a runner, every line of her figure an expression of amazement. He had seen her before, but his memory was wretched for women's faces. But the odd thing was that, after the first second, there was recognition in her face.

“Colonel Milburne!” said the voice. “What in the name of goodness are you doing here?”

She knew him, and he knew her, but where—when—had they met? He must have stared blankly, for the girl laughed.

"You have forgotten," she said. "But I have seen you out with the Mivern, and we met at luncheon at Wirlesdon in the winter."

He remembered now, and what he remembered chiefly were the last words he had spoken to me on the subject of this girl. The adventure was becoming farcical.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "You are Miss Arabin. I didn't know——"

"I am Miss Arabin. But why the honour of an early morning call from Colonel Milburne?"

"I came here last night in a yacht." Vernon was making a lame business of his explanation, for the startled angry eyes of his hostess scattered his wits. "I anchored below in the fog, and an old man came out in a boat and asked me to come ashore. There was a woman on the beach—your maid—and she implored my help—told a story I didn't quite follow——"

"The fog!" the girl repeated. "That of course explains why you were allowed to anchor. In clear weather you would have been driven away."

She spoke in so assured a tone that Vernon was piqued.

"The seas are free," he said. "Who would have interfered with me? Your servants?"

She laughed again, mirthlessly. "My people. Not my servants. Continue. You came ashore and listened to Élise's chatter. After that?"

"She said you were asleep and must not be wakened, but that I should speak to you in

the morning. She put me up for the night."

"Where?" she asked sharply.

"In a little room on the top floor."

"I see. 'Where you sleeps you breakfasts.' Well, we'd better have some food."

She rang a little silver handbell, and the maid, who must have been waiting close at hand, appeared with coffee and boiled eggs. She cast an anxious glance at Vernon as if to inquire how he had fared at her mistress's hands.

"Sit down," said the girl when Élise had gone. "I can't give you much to eat, for these days we are on short rations. I'm sorry, but there's no sugar. I can recommend the honey. It's the only good thing in Plakos."

"Is this Plakos? I came here once before—in 1914—in a steam yacht. I suppose I am in the big white house which looks down upon the jetty. I could see nothing last night in the fog. I remember a long causeway and steps cut in the rock. That must have been the road I came."

She nodded. "What kind of sailor are you to be so ignorant of your whereabouts? Oh, I see, the storm! What's the size of your boat?"

When he told her, she exclaimed. "You must have had the devil of a time, for it was a first-class gale. And now on your arrival in port you are plunged into melodrama. You don't look as if you had much taste for melodrama, Colonel Milburne."

"I haven't. But is it really melodrama? Your maid told me a rather alarming tale."

Her eyes had the hard agate gleam which he remembered from Wirlesdon. Then he had

detested her, but now, as he looked at her, he saw that which made him alter his judgment. The small face was very pale, and there were dark lines under the eyes. This girl was undergoing some heavy strain, and her casual manner was in the nature of a shield.

"Is it true?" he asked.

"So-so. In parts, no doubt. I am having trouble with my tenants, which I am told is a thing that happens even in England. But that is my own concern, and I don't ask for help. After breakfast I would suggest that you go back to your yacht."

"I think you had better come with me. You and your maid. I take it that the old man Mitri can fend for himself."

"How kind of you!" she cried in a falsetto, mimicking voice. "How extraordinarily kind! But you see I haven't asked your help, and I don't propose to accept it. . . . You're sure you won't have any more coffee! I wonder if you could give me a cigarette? I've been out of them for three days."

She lay back in a wicker chair, rocking herself and lazily blowing smoke clouds. Vernon stood with his back to the fire and filled a pipe.

"I don't see how I can go away," he said, "unless I can convince myself that you're in no danger. You're English, and a woman, and I'm bound to help you whether you want it or not." He spoke with assurance now, perhaps with a certain priggishness. The tone may have offended the girl, for when she spoke it was with a touch of the insolence which he remembered at Wirlesdon.

"I'm curious to know what Élise told you last night."

"Simply that you were imprisoned here by the people of Plakos—that they thought you a witch and might very likely treat you in the savage way that people used to treat witches."

She nodded. "That's about the size of it. But what if I refuse to let anyone interfere in a fight between me and my own people? Supposing this is something which I must stick out for the sake of my own credit? What then, Colonel Milburne? You have been a soldier. You wouldn't advise me to run away."

"That depends," said Vernon. "There are fights where there can be no victory—where the right course is to run away. Your maid told me something else. She said that the evil reputation you had among the peasants was not your own doing—that of course I guessed—but a legacy from your family, who for very good reasons were unpopular. Does that make no difference?"

"How?"

"Why, there's surely no obligation in honour to make yourself a vicarious sacrifice for other people's misdeeds!"

"I—don't—think I agree. One must pay for one's race as well as for oneself."

"Oh, nonsense! Not the kind of thing your family seem to have amused themselves with."

"What do you mean?"

"I was put into a room last night——" Vernon spoke hesitatingly—"and I saw some books and paintings. They were horrible. I understood—well, that the peasants might have a good deal of

reason—something to say for themselves, you know. Why should you suffer for that swinishness? ”

The morning sun had broken through the fog and was shining full on the girl's face. She sprang to her feet, and Vernon saw that she had blushed deeply.

“ You entered those rooms ! ” she cried. “ That fool Élise ! I will have her beaten. Oh, I am shamed. . . . Get off with you ! You are only making me wretched. Get off while there's time.”

The sight of her crimson face and neck moved Vernon to a deep compassion.

“ I refuse to leave without you, Miss Arabin,” he said. “ I do not know much, but I know enough to see that you are in deadly danger. I can no more leave you here than I could leave a drowning child in the sea. Quick ! Get your maid and pack some things and we'll be gone.”

She stood before him, an abashed obstinate child.

“ I won't go . . . I hate you. . . . You have seen—oh, leave me, if you have any pity.”

“ You come with me.”

“ I won't ! ” Her lips were a thin line, and the shut jaws made a square of the resolute little face.

“ Then I shall carry you off. I'm very sorry, Miss Arabin, but I'm going to save you in spite of yourself.”

Vernon had his hand stretched out to the silver handbell to summon Élise, when he found himself looking at a small pistol. He caught her wrist, expecting it to go off, but nothing happened. It dropped into his hand and he saw that it was unloaded.

He rang the bell.

"All the more reason why you should come with me if you are so badly armed."

The girl stood stiff and silent, her eyes and cheeks burning, as Élise entered.

"Pack for your mistress," he told the maid. "Bring as little baggage as possible, for there isn't much room." The woman hurried off gladly to do his bidding.

"Please don't make a scene," he said. "You will have to come in the end and some day you will forgive me."

"I will not come," she said, "but I will show you something."

Life seemed to have been restored to her tense body, as she hurried him out of the room, along a corridor, and up a flight of stairs to a window which looked seaward.

The last wreath of fog had disappeared, and the half-moon of bay lay blue and sparkling. Down at the jetty were men and boats, but out on the water there was no sign of the anchored yacht.

"What does that mean?" Vernon cried.

"It means that your boat has gone. When the air cleared the people saw it, and have driven your man away. . . . It means that you, like me, are a prisoner!"

XXV: THE RITUAL OF SPRING

AS Vernon looked at the flushed girl, whose voice as she spoke had at least as much consternation in it as triumph, he experienced a sudden dislocation of mind. Something fell from

him—the elderliness, the preoccupation, the stiff dogma of his recent years. He recaptured the spirit which had open arms for novelty. He felt an eagerness to be up and doing—what, he was not clear—but something difficult and high-handed. The vanishing of his dream had left the chambers of his mind swept and garnished, and youth does not tolerate empty rooms.

Also, though I do not think that he had yet begun to fall in love with Koré, he understood the quality of one whom aforesometimes he had disliked both as individual and type. This pale girl, dressed like a young woman in a Scots shooting-lodge, was facing terror with a stiff lip. There was nothing raffish or second-rate about her now. She might make light of her danger in her words, but her eyes betrayed her.

It was about this danger that he was still undecided. You see, he had not, like me, seen the people of the island, felt the strain of their expectancy, or looked on the secret spaces of the Dancing Floor. He had come out of the storm to hear a tale told in the fog and darkness by an excited woman. That was all—that and the hideous rooms at which he had had a passing glance. The atmosphere of the place, which I had found so unnerving, had not yet begun to affect him.

“My fellow will come back,” he said, after scanning the empty seas. “He has his faults, but he is plucky and faithful.”

“You do not understand,” the girl said. “He would be one against a thousand. He may be as brave as a lion, but they won’t let him anchor, and if they did they would never let you and me join

him. I have told you we are prisoners—close prisoners.”

“You must tell me a great deal more. You see, you can’t refuse my help now, for we are in the same boat. Do you mind if we go back to where we breakfasted, for I left my pipe there.”

She turned without a word and led him back to her sitting-room, passing a woe-begone Élise who, with her arms full of clothes, was told that her services were now needless. The windows of the room looked on a garden which had been suffered to run wild but which still showed a wealth of spring blossom. Beyond was a shallow terrace and then the darkness of trees. A man’s head seemed to move behind a cypress hedge. The girl nodded towards it. “One of my gaolers,” she said.

She stood looking out of the window with her eyes averted from Vernon, and seemed to be forcing herself to speak.

“You have guessed right about my family,” she said. “And about this house. I am cleaning it slowly—I must do it myself, Élise and I, for I do not want strangers to know. . . . This room was as bad as the other two till I white-washed the walls. The old furniture I am storing till I have time to destroy it. I think I will burn it, for it has hideous associations for me. I would have had the whole house in order this spring if my foolish people had not lost their heads.”

A “tawdry girl,” that was how Vernon had spoken of her to me. He withdrew the word now. “Tawdry” was the last adjective he would use about this strange child, fighting alone to get rid of a burden of ancient evil. He had

thought her a modish, artificial being, a moth hatched out of the latest freak of fashion. Now she seemed to him a thousand years removed from the feverish world which he had thought her natural setting. Her appeal was her extreme candour and simplicity, her utter, savage, unconsidering courage.

"Let us take the family for granted," Vernon said gently. "I can't expect you to talk about that. I assume that there was that in your predecessor's doings which gave these islanders a legitimate grievance. What I want to know is what they are up to now. Tell me very carefully everything that has happened since you came here a week ago."

She had little to tell him. She had been allowed to enter the House by the ordinary road from the village, and after that the gates had been barred. When she had attempted to go for a walk she had been turned back by men with rifles—she did not tell Vernon how the rifles had been procured. The hillmen had joined with the people of the coast—you could always tell a hillman by his dress—though the two used to be hereditary enemies. That made her angry and also uneasy; so did the curious methodical ways of the siege. They were not attempting to enter the House—she doubted if any one of them would dare to cross the threshold—they were only there to prevent her leaving it. She herself, not the looting of the House, must be their object. Mitri was permitted to go to the village, but he did not go often, for he came back terrified and could not or would not explain his

terrors. No communication had been held with the watchers, and no message had come from them. She had tried repeatedly to find out their intentions, but the sentinels would not speak, and she could make nothing of Mitri. No, she was not allowed into the demesne. There were sentries there right up to the house wall—sentries night and day.

Vernon asked her about supplies. She had brought a store with her which was not yet exhausted, but the people sent up food every morning. Mitri found it laid on the threshold of the main door. Curious food—barley cakes and honey and cheese and eggs and dried figs. She couldn't imagine where they got it from, for the people had been starving in the winter. Milk, too—plenty of milk, which was another unexpected thing.

Water—that was the oddest business of all. The House had a fine well in the stableyard on the east side. This had been sealed up and its use forbidden to Mitri. But morning and night buckets of fresh water were brought to the door—whence, she did not know. "It rather restricts our bathing arrangements," she said.

She told the story lightly, with a ready laugh, as if she were once more mistress of herself. Mistress of her voice she certainly was, but she could not command her eyes. It was these that counteracted the debonair tones and kept tragedy in the atmosphere.

Vernon, as I have said, had not the reason which I had for feeling the gravity of the business. But he was a scholar, and there were details in Koré's account which startled him.

"Tell me about the food again. Cheese and honey and barley cakes, dried figs and eggs—nothing more?"

"Nothing more. And not a great deal of that. Not more than enough to feed one person for twenty-four hours. We have to supplement it from the stores we brought."

"I see. . . . It is meant for you personally—not for your household. And the water? You don't know what spring it comes from?"

She shook her head. "There are many springs in Plakos. But why does our commissariat interest you?"

"Because it reminds me of something I have read somewhere. Cheese and honey and barley cakes—that is ritual food. Sacramental, if you like. And the water. Probably brought from some sacred well. I don't much like it. Tell me about the people here, Miss Arabin. Are they very backward and superstitious?"

"I suppose you might call them that. They are a fine race to look at, and claim to be pure Greek—at least the coast folk. The hillmen are said to be mongrels, but they are handsome mongrels and fought bravely in the war. But I don't know them well, for I left when I was a child, and since my father died I have only seen the people of Kynætho."

"Kynætho?" Vernon cried out sharply, for the word was like a bell to ring up the curtain of memory.

"Yes, Kynætho. That is the village at the gate."

Now he had the clue. Kynætho was the place

mentioned in the manuscript fragment which he had translated for me. It was at Kynætho that the strange rite was performed of the Koré and the Kouros. The details were engraven on his memory, for they had profoundly impressed him and he had turned them over repeatedly in his mind. He had thought he had discovered the record of a new ritual form ; rather it appeared that he had stumbled upon the living rite itself.

" I begin—to understand," he said slowly. " I want you to let me speak to Mitri. Alone, if you please. I have done this work before in the war, and I can get more out of that kind of fellow if I am alone with him. Then I shall prospect the land."

He found Mitri in his lair in the ancient kitchen. With the old man there was no trouble, for when he found that his interlocutor spoke Greek fluently he overflowed in confidences.

" They will burn this House," he said finally. " They have piled faggots on the north and east sides where the wind blows. And the time will be Easter eve."

" And your mistress ? "

Mitri shrugged his shoulders. " There is no hope for her, I tell you. She had a chance of flight and missed it, though I pled with her. She will burn with the House unless——"

He looked at Vernon timidly, as if he feared to reveal something.

" Unless—— ? " said Vernon.

" There is a rumour in Kynætho of something else. In that accursed village they have preserved tales of the old days, and they say that on the

night of Good Friday there will be *panegyria* on the Dancing Floor. There will be a race with torches, and he who wins will be called King. To him it will fall to slay my mistress in order that the Ancient Ones may appear and bless the people."

"I see," said Vernon. "Do you believe in that rubbish?"

Mitri crossed himself and called the Panagia to witness that he was a Christian and, after God and the Saints, loved his mistress.

"That is well. I trust you, Mitri; and I will show you how you can save her. You are allowed to leave the House?"

"Every second day only. I went yesterday, and cannot go again till to-morrow. I have a daughter married in the village, whom I am permitted to visit."

"Very well. We are still two days from Good Friday. Go down to the village to-morrow and find out all about the plans for Good Friday evening. Lie as much as you like. Say you hate your mistress and will desert her whenever you are bidden. Pretend you're on the other side. Get their confidence. . . . A madness has afflicted this island and you are the only sane Christian left in it. If these ruffians hurt your mistress, the Government—both in Athens and in London—will send soldiers and hang many. After that there will be no more Kynætho. We have got to prevent the people making fools of themselves. Your mistress is English and I am English, and that is why I stay here. You do exactly as I tell you and we'll win through."

It was essential to encourage Mitri, for the old

man was patently torn between superstitious fear and fidelity to Koré, and only a robust scepticism and a lively hope would enable him to keep his tail up and do his part. Vernon accordingly protested a confidence which he was very far from feeling. It was arranged that Mitri should go to Kynætho next morning after breakfast and spend the day there.

After that, guided by the old man, Vernon made a circuit of the House. From the top windows he was able to follow the lie of the land—the postern gates to the shore, the nest of stables and out-buildings on the east with access to the shallow glen running up from the jetty, the main entrance and the drive from Kynætho, the wooded demesne ending at the cliffs, and the orchards and oliveyards between the cliffs and the causeway. The patrols came right up to the House wall, and on various sides Vernon had a glimpse of them. But he failed to get what he specially sought, a prospect of any part of the adjoining coast-line beyond the little bay. He believed that his yacht was somewhere hidden there, out of sight of the peasants. He was convinced that the Epirote would obey orders and wait for him, and would not go one yard farther away than was strictly necessary. But he was at a loss to know how to find him, if he were penned up in this shuttered mausoleum.

He returned to find Koré sewing by the window of the breakfast room. He entered quietly and had a momentary glimpse of her before she was conscious of his presence. She was looking straight before her with vacant eyes, her face in profile against the window, a figure of infinite appeal.

Vernon had a moment of acute compunction. What he had once thought and spoken of this poor child seemed to him now to have been senseless brutality. He had called her tawdry and vulgar and shrill, he had thought her the ugly product of the ugly after-the-war world. But there she sat like a muse of meditation, as fine and delicate as a sword-blade. And she had a sword's steel, too, for had she not faced unknown peril for a scruple?

"What does Mitri say?" she asked in a voice which had a forced briskness in it.

"I shall know more to-morrow night, but I have learned something. You are safe for the better part of three days—till some time on Good Friday evening. That is one thing. The other is that your scheme of wearing down the hostility of your people has failed. Your islanders have gone stark mad. The business is far too solemn for me to speak smooth things. They have resurrected an old pagan rite of sacrifice. *Sacrifice*, do you understand? This House will be burned, and if they have their will you will die."

"I was beginning to guess as much. I don't want to die, for it means defeat. But I don't think I am afraid to die. You see—life is rather difficult—and not very satisfactory. But tell me more."

Vernon gave her a sketch of the ritual of Kynætho. "It was your mentioning the name that brought it back to me. I have always been interested in Greek religion, and by an amazing chance I came on this only a month or so ago. Leithen—the lawyer—you know him, I think—

gave me a bit of mediæval Greek manuscript to translate, and part of it had this rite."

"Leithen," she cried. "Sir Edward? Then he found it among the papers I lent him. Why didn't he tell me about it?"

"I can't imagine."

"Perhaps he thought I wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't a month ago. Perhaps he thought he could prevent me coming here. I think he did his best. I had to go off without saying good-bye to him, and he was my greatest friend."

"He happens to be also my closest friend. If you had known about this—this crazy ritual, would you have come?"

She smiled. "I don't know. I'm very obstinate, and I can't bear to be bullied. These people are trying to bully me. . . . But of course I didn't know how bad it was. . . . And I didn't know that I was going to land you in this mess. That is what weighs on my mind."

"But you didn't invite me here. You told me to clear out."

"My servants invited you and therefore I am responsible. . . . Oh, Colonel Milburne, you must understand what I feel. I haven't had an easy life, for I seem to have been always fighting, but I didn't mind it as long as it was my own fight. I felt I had to stick it out, for it was the penalty I paid for being an Arabin. But whatever paying was to be done I wanted to do it myself. . . . Otherwise, don't you see, it makes the guilt of my family so much heavier. . . . And now I have let you in for it, and that is hell—simply hell!"

Vernon had suddenly an emotion which he had

never known before—the exhilaration with which he had for years anticipated the culmination of his dream, but different in kind, nobler, less self-regarding. He felt keyed up to any enterprise, and singularly confident. There was tenderness in his mood, too, which was a thing he had rarely felt—tenderness towards this gallant child.

“Listen to me, Miss Arabin. I have two things to say to you. One is that I glory in being here. I wouldn’t be elsewhere for the world. It is a delight and a privilege. The other is that we are going to win out.”

“But how?”

“I don’t know yet. We will find a way. I am as certain of it as that I am standing here. God doesn’t mean a thing like this to be a blind *cul-de-sac*.”

“You believe in God? I wish I did. I think I only believe in the Devil.”

“Then you believe in God. If evil is a living thing, good must be living as well—more indeed, or the world would smash. . . . Look here, we’ve two days to put in together. There is nothing we can do for the present, so we must find some way to keep our nerves quiet. Let’s pretend we’re in an ordinary English country house and kept indoors by rain.”

So the two of them made plans to pass the time, while the clear spring sunlight outside turned Vernon’s pretence into foolishness. They played piquet, and sometimes he read to her—chiefly Peter Beckford. The florid eighteenth-century prose, the tags of Augustan poetry, the high stilts, the gusto, carried their thoughts to the orderly

world of home. I have no wish to speculate about the secrets of a friend, but I fancy that the slow hours spent together brought understanding. Koré must have told him things which she had kept back from me, for the near prospect of death breaks down many barriers. I think, too, that he may have told her the story of his boyish dream—he must have, for it bore directly on the case. With his sense of predestination he would draw from it a special confidence, and she would be made to share it. He had undergone a long preparation for something which had ended in mist, but the preparation might point to success in a great reality. . . .

Late the following afternoon old Mitri returned. Vernon saw him first alone, and got from him the details of the next evening's ceremonial. There was to be a race among the young men on the Dancing Floor as soon as the moon rose, and the victor would be called the King. Some of the news which Mitri had gathered was unexpected, some incomprehensible, but in the main it agreed with his own version. The victor would choose a victim—a male victim, clearly, for the female victim was already chosen. The two would enter the House, and on the next night—the eve of this grim Easter—the sacrifice would be accomplished. Beyond that Mitri could say nothing except that the people looked for a mighty miracle; but the manuscript had told what the miracle would be.

“Who will be the runners?” Vernon asked.

“The fleetest among the young men, both of the village and the hills.”

It was characteristic of Vernon's fatalism that he had not troubled to make even the rudiments of a plan till he had heard Mitri's tidings. Now the thing began to unfold itself. The next step at any rate was clearly ordained.

"Will everybody be known to each other?" he said.

"Faith, no. Kynætho till now has had few dealings with the hill folk, and the villages in the hills are generally at strife with each other. To-morrow night there will be many strangers, and no questions will be asked, for all will be allies in this devilry."

"Do I speak like a Greek?"

"You speak like a Greek, but like one from another island."

"And I look like an islander?"

Mitri grinned. "There are few as well-looking. But if your face were darkened, you would pass. There is a place, a little remote place in the hills, Akte by name, where the folk are said to have white skins like you, Signor."

"Well, attend, Mitri. I am a man from Akte who has been at the wars, and has just returned. That will account for my foreign speech."

"The Signor jests. He has a stout heart that can jest——"

"I'm not jesting. I'm going to compete in the race to-morrow night. What is more, I'm going to win. I've been a bit of a runner in my time, and I'm in hard training."

A faint spark appeared in the old man's eye.

"The Signor will no doubt win if he runs. And if he ever reaches the Dancing Floor he will not

be troubled with questions. But how will he reach the Dancing Floor?"

"I intend to get out of the House early tomorrow morning. There are several things I want to do before the race. Have you any rags with which I can imitate the dress of a hillman?"

Mitri considered. Shirt and breeches he had, but no boots. A cap might be improvised, but boots?

"Remember I have only just returned to Akte, and have brought the fashion of the war with me. So I can make shift with home-made puttees. Anything else?"

"The men around the House will not let you pass."

"They'll have to. I'm one of themselves, and you've got to coach me in local customs. You have twelve hours before you in which to turn me into a respectable citizen of Akte. If any awkward questions are asked I propose to be truculent. A soldier is going to stand no nonsense from civilians, you know."

Mitri considered again. "It will be best to go by the main road to Kynætho."

"No, I'm going by the causeway. I want to see what lies beyond it to the west."

"The cliffs are there and there is no road."

"I will find one."

Mitri shook his head. He had apparently little belief in the scheme, but an hour later, after Vernon had given Koré a sketch of his intentions, he arrived with an armful of strange garments. Elise at her mistress's request had collected oddments of fabrics, and brought part of the contents of the linen-cupboard.

"We are about," Vernon told a mystified Koré, "to prepare for private theatricals. Puttees are my most urgent need, and that thin skirt of yours will be the very thing."

Since Koré still looked puzzled he added: "We're cast for parts in a rather sensational drama. I'm beginning to think that the only way to prevent it being a tragedy is to turn it into a costume-play."

XXVI: THE TORCH-BEARER

VERY early next morning, before the blue darkness had paled into dawn, Vernon swung his legs out of an upper window of the House, crawled along the broad parapet and began to descend by a waterpipe in an angle between the main building and the eastern wing. This brought him to the roof of one of the outbuildings, from which it was possible for an active man to reach the road which ran upward from the jetty. He had been carefully prepared by Mitri for his part. The loose white shirt and the short mountain tunic were in order. Mitri's breeches had proved too scanty, but Élise had widened them, and the vacant space about his middle was filled with a dirty red cummerbund, made of one of Mitri's sashes, in which were stuck a long knife and his pistol. A pair of Mitri's home-made shoes of soft untanned hide were supplemented by home-made puttees. He had no hat; he had stained his face, hands and arms beyond their natural brown with juice from Mitri's store of pickled walnuts, and—under the critical eye of Koré—had rubbed dirt under his eyes and into

his finger-nails till he looked the image of a handsome, swaggering, half-washed soldier. More important, he had been coached by Mitri in the speech of the hills, the gossip which might have penetrated to the remote Akte, and the mannerisms of the hillmen, which were unpleasingly familiar to the dwellers by the sea.

All this care would have been useless had Vernon not been in the mood to carry off any enterprise. He felt the reckless audacity of a boy, an exhilaration which was almost intoxication, and the source of which he did not pause to consider. Above all he felt complete confidence. Somehow, somewhere, he would break the malign spell and set Koré beyond the reach of her enemies.

He reached ground fifty yards south of the jetty and turned at once in the direction of the sea. At the beginning of the causeway he met a man.

"Whither away, brother?" came the question, accompanied by the lift of a rifle.

Vernon gave the hillman's greeting. He loomed up tall and formidable in the half-darkness.

"I go beyond the causeway to the oliveyards," he said carelessly, as if he condescended in answering.

"By whose orders?"

"We of Akte do not take orders. I go at the request of the Elders"

"You are of Akte?" said the man curiously. He was very willing to talk, being bored with his long night-watch. "There are none of Akte among us, so far as I have seen. The men of Akte live in the moon, says the proverb. But..."—this after peering at Vernon's garb—"these clothes were never made in the hills."

"I am new back from the war, and have not seen Akte these three years. But I cannot linger, friend."

"Nay, bide a little. It is not yet day. Let us talk of Akte. My father once went there for cattle. . . . Or let us speak of the war. My uncle was in the old war and my young nephew was . . . If you will not bide, give me tobacco."

Vernon gave him a cigarette. "These are what we smoked in Smyrna," he said. "They are noble stuff."

Half-way along the causeway a second guard proved more truculent. He questioned the orders of the Elders, till Vernon played the man from Akte and the old soldier, and threatened to fling him into the sea. The last sentry was fortunately asleep. Vernon scrambled over the fence of the oliveyards, and as the sun rose above the horizon was striding with long steps through the weedy undergrowth.

His object was not like mine when I travelled that road, to get inside the demesne; he wanted to keep out of it, and to explore the bit of coast under it, since it seemed from the map to be the likeliest place to find his boat. The Epirote, he was convinced, would obey his instructions faithfully, and when driven away from his old anchorage would not go a yard more than was necessary. So, after being stopped as I had been by the wall which ran to the cliffs, he stuck to the shore. He picked his way under the skirts of the great headland till the rock sank sheer into deep water. There was nothing for it now but to swim, so he made a bundle of his shirt and jacket, and bound

them with the cummerbund on his shoulders, took his pistol in his teeth and slipped into the cold green sea. Mitri's breeches were a nuisance, but he was a strong swimmer, and in five minutes was at the point of the headland.

He found a ledge of rock which enabled him to pull up his shoulders and reconnoitre the hidden bay. There to his joy was the yacht, snugly anchored half-way across. There was no sign of life on board, for doubtless the Epirote was below cooking his breakfast. Vernon had no desire to make himself conspicuous by shouting, for the demesne and the watchers were too near, so he dropped back into the water and struck out for the boat. Ten minutes later he was standing dripping on the deck, and the Epirote was welcoming him with maledictions on Plakos.

He stripped off his wet clothes, and put on his old aquascutum till they should be dried. Then he breakfasted heartily, while Black George gave an account of his stewardship. When Vernon did not return he had not concerned himself greatly, for the affairs of his master were no business of his. But in the morning, when the fog began to lift, men had put off from shore in a boat and had demanded the reason of his presence. The interview had been stormy, for he had declined to explain, holding that if his master chose to land secretly by night, and rude fellows appeared with the daylight, it would be wise to tell the latter nothing. His interviewers had been more communicative. They had been very excited and had tried to alarm him with foolish tales of witches. But it was clear that they had meant mischief,

for all were armed, and when at the point of several rifle barrels they had ordered him to depart, it seemed to him the part of a wise man to obey. He had feigned fear and deep stupidity, and had upped sail and done their bidding. Then, looking for a refuge, he had seen the great curtain of cliff and had found this little bay. Here he hoped he was secure, for there was no passage along the shore, and the people of Plakos did not seem during these days to be sailing the seas. He could be observed, of course, from the cliff tops, but these were shrouded in wood and looked unfrequented.

"Did I not well, Signor?" he asked anxiously.

"You did well. Have you seen no one?"

"No islander. Last night two men came about midnight. One was a crippled Greek and the other man, I judge, English."

Vernon woke to the liveliest interest, but Black George told a halting tale. "He swam out and wakened me, and at first, fearing trouble, I would have brained him. Since he could not speak my tongue, I rowed ashore with him and saw the Greek. . . . He was an Englishman, beyond doubt, and a Signor, so I gave him food."

"What did he want with you?"

"Simply that I should stay here. He had a story of some lady to whom the devils of this island meant mischief, and he begged me to wait in case the lady should seek to escape."

No cross-examination of Vernon's could make Black George amplify the tale. He had not understood clearly, he said, for the English Signor could not speak his tongue and the Greek who interpreted was obviously a fool. But he had

promised to remain, which was indeed his duty to his master. No. He had spoken no single word of his master. He had not said he was an Englishman. He had said nothing.

Vernon puzzled over the matter but could make nothing of it. He did not credit the story of an Englishman in Plakos who knew of Koré's plight, and came to the conclusion that Black George had misunderstood his visitor's talk. He had the day before him, and his first act was to row ashore to the other point of the bay—the place from which Janni and I had first espied the yacht. There he sat for a little and smoked, and it was one of his cigarette ends that I found the same afternoon. A scramble round the headland showed him the strip of beach below the Dancing Floor, but it occurred to him that there was no need to go pioneering along the coast—that he had a yacht and could be landed wherever he pleased. So he returned to Black George, and the two hoisted sail and made for open sea.

The day was spent running, with the light north-west wind behind them, well to the south of Plakos, and then tacking back till about sunset they stood off the north-east shore. It was a day of brilliant sun, tempered by cool airs, with the hills of the island rising sharp and blue into the pale spring sky. Vernon found to his delight that he had no trepidation about the work of the coming night. He had brought with him the copy he had made of his translation of Koré's manuscript, and studied it as a man studies a map, without any sense of its strangeness. The madmen of Plakos were about to revive an ancient ritual, where the

victor in a race would be entrusted with certain barbarous duties. He proposed to be the victor, and so to defeat the folly. The House would be burnt, and in the confusion he would escape with Koré to the yacht, and leave the unhallowed isle for ever. The girl's honour would be satisfied, for she would have stuck it out to the last. Once he had convinced himself that she would be safe, he let his mind lie fallow. He dreamed and smoked on the hot deck in the bright weather, as much at his ease as if the evening were to bring no more than supper and sleep.

In the early twilight the yacht's dinghy put him ashore on a lonely bit of coast east of the village. Black George was ordered to return to his former anchorage and wait there; if on the following night he saw a lantern raised three times on the cliff above, he was to come round to the oliveyards at the far end of the causeway. At this stage Vernon's plan was for a simple escape in the confusion of the fire. He hoped that the postern gate at the jetty would be practicable; if not he would find some way of reaching the oliveyards from the demesne. The whole affair was viewed by him as a straightforward enterprise—provided he could win the confounded race.

But with his landing on Plakos in the spring gloaming his mood began to change. I have failed in my portrayal of Vernon if I have made you think of him as unimaginative and insensitive. He had unexpected blind patches in his vision and odd callosities in his skin, but for all that he was highly strung and had an immense capacity for emotion, though he chose mostly to sit on the safety valve.

Above all he was a scholar. All his life he had been creating imaginative pictures of things, or living among the creations of other men. He had not walked a mile in that twilight till he felt the solemnity of it oppressing his mind.

I think it was chiefly the sight of the multitude moving towards the Dancing Floor, all silent, so that the only sound was the tread of feet. He had been in doubt before as to where exactly the place was, but the road was blazed for him like the roads to Epsom on Derby Day. Men, women, children, babes-in-arms, they were streaming past the closes at the foot of the glade, past the graveyard, up the aisle of the Dancing Floor. It was his first sight of it—not as I had seen it solitary under the moon, but surging with a stream of hushed humanity. It had another kind of magic, but one as potent as that which had laid its spell on me. I had seen the temple in its loneliness, he saw it thronged with worshippers.

No one greeted him or even noticed him; he would probably have passed unregarded if he had been wearing his ordinary clothes. The heavy preoccupation of the people made them utterly incurious. He saw men dressed as he was, and he noted that the multitude moved to left and right as if by instinct, leaving the central arena vacant. Dusk had fallen, and on the crown of the ridge on his right he saw dimly what he knew to be the trees of the demesne. He saw, too, that a cluster seemed to be forming at the lower end of the arena, apart from the others, and he guessed that these were the competitors in the race. He made his way towards them, and found

that he had guessed rightly. It was a knot of young men, who were now stripping their clothes, till they stood naked except for the sashes twisted around their middle. Most were barefoot, but one or two had raw-hide brogues. Vernon followed their example, till he stood up in his short linen drawers. He retained Mitri's shoes, for he feared the flints of the hillside. There were others in the group, older men whom he took to be the Elders of whom Mitri had spoken, and there was one man who seemed to be in special authority, and who wore a loose white cassock.

It was now nearly dark, and suddenly, like the marks delimiting a course, torches broke into flame. These points of angry light in the crowded silence seemed to complete the spell. Vernon's assurance had fled and left behind it an unwilling awe and an acute nervousness. All his learning, all his laborious scholarship quickened from mere mental furniture into heat and light. His imagination as well as his nerves were on fire. I can only guess at the thoughts which must have crowded his mind. He saw the ritual, which so far had been for him an antiquarian remnant, leap into a living passion. He saw what he had regarded coolly as a barbaric survival, a matter for brutish peasants, become suddenly a vital concern of his own. Above all, he felt the formidableness of the peril to Koré. She had dared far more than she knew, far more than he had guessed; she was facing the heavy menace of a thousand ages, the devils not of a few hundred peasants but of a whole forgotten world. . . . And in that moment he has told me that another thing became clear to

him—she had become for him something altogether rare and precious.

The old man in the white ephod was speaking. It was a tale which had obviously been told before to the same audience, for he reminded them of former instructions. Vernon forced himself to concentrate on it an attention which was half paralysed by that mood of novel emotion which had come upon him. Some of it he failed to grasp, but the main points were clear—the race twice round the arena outside the ring of torches, the duty of the victor to take the last torch and plunge it in the sacred spring. The man spoke as if reciting a lesson, and Vernon heard it like a lesson once known and forgotten. Reminiscences of what he had found in classical by-ways hammered on his mind, and with recollection came a greater awe. It was only the thought of Koré that enabled him to keep his wits. Without that, he told me, he would have sunk into the lethargy of the worshippers, obedient, absorbed in expectancy.

Then came the start, and the race which Janni and I watched from our hiding-place in the shadows under the wall. He got off the mark clumsily, and at first his limbs seemed heavy as lead. But the movement revived him and woke his old racing instinct. Though he had not run for years, he was in hard training, and towards the close of the first round his skill had come back to him and he was in the third place, going well within his powers. In the second round he felt that the thing was in his hands. He lay close to the first man, passed him before the final straight, and then forged ahead so that in the last hundred

yards he was gaining ground with every stride. He seized the torch at the winning-post and raced to where in the centre of the upper glade a white figure stood alone. With the tossing of the flame into the well he straightened his body and looked round, a man restored to his old vigour and ready for swift action.

His account of the next stage was confused, for his mind was on Koré and he was going through a violent transformation of outlook. The old man was no longer repeating a rehearsed lesson, but speaking violently like one in a moment of crisis. He addressed Vernon as "You of the hills," and told him that God had placed the fate of Kynætho in his hands—which God he did not particularise. But, from his excited stammering, something emerged that chilled Vernon's blood. . . . He was to wait in the House till moonrise of the next night. The signal was to be the firing of the place. With the first flames he was to perform the deed to which he had been called. "Choose which way you please," said the old man, "provided that they die." Then he would leave the House by the main door and join the young men without. "They will be gathered there till those come who will come." The door would be closed behind him till it was opened by the fire. . . . "They who will come are Immortals."

The man's voice was high-pitched with passion, and his figure, solitary in the moonshine in that ring of silent folk, had something in it of the awful and the sacramental. But Vernon's thoughts were not on it, but on the news which meant the downfall of his plans. His mind worked now

normally and sanely ; he was again a man of the modern world. The young men—of course they would be there—the Kouretes to greet the Kouros. He might have known it, if he had only thought. But how was Koré to escape from those frenzied guardians ? He had imagined that with the fire the vigilance of the watch would be relaxed and that it would be easy to join Black George and the boat. But with the fire there was to be a thronging of the hierophants towards the House, and what was inside would be kept inside till the place was a heap of ashes.

The man was speaking again. He had made some signal, for three figures had approached the well. "The woman is within," he said, "and it is for you to choose the man. Your choice is free among the people of Plakos, but we have one here, a young man, a Greek, but a stranger. He would doubtless be acceptable."

The half-clad Maris cut an odd figure as, in the grip of two stalwart peasants, he was led forward for inspection. His face was white and set, and his eyes were furious. "No willing victim this," thought Vernon, "but so much the better, for he and I are in the same boat and I must make him an ally." From the way he carried himself he saw that Maris had been drilled, and he considered that a soldier might be useful. "I choose this man," he said.

A jar was given him, and he filled it from the spring and emptied it on Maris's head and shoulders. His own clothes were also brought, but he contented himself with Mitri's sash, of which he made a girdle and into which he stuck his own pistol and Mitri's knife. "I have no need of the rest," he said, for he was beginning to enter into

the spirit of the part. Then he knelt while the old man laid a hand on his head and pronounced some consecration. "Come," he said to Maris, and the two moved up the slope of the Dancing Floor towards the breach in the wall.

He had almost forgotten his anxiety in the wonder of the scene. He seemed to be set on a stage in a great golden amphitheatre, and Maris and the guards who accompanied him were no more than stage properties. All human life had for the moment gone, and he was faced with primordial elements—the scented shell of earth, the immense arch of the sky and the riding moon, and, as he climbed the slope, an infinity of shining waters. The magic weighed on him, a new magic, for the ruthlessness of man was submerged in the deeper ruthlessness of nature. . . . And then, as he passed the fringe of the spectators and caught a glimpse of pallid strained faces, he got his bearings again. It was man he had to cope with, crazy, fallible, tormented man. He felt the pity and innocence of it behind the guilt, and in an instant he regained confidence. . . . Maris was stumbling along, walking painfully like one unaccustomed to going on bare feet, casting fierce startled glances about him. As they approached the breach in the wall Vernon managed to whisper to him to cheer up, for no ill would befall him. "I am your friend," he said; "together we will make an end of this folly," and the man's face lightened.

It was this look on Maris's face which I saw from my hiding-place and which made me forbid Janni's pistol shot.

XXVII: PREPARATION

THE great doors clanged behind them, and Vernon, who had been given the key by the guards, turned it in the lock. In spite of the reassuring word he had spoken to Maris he thought that his companion might attack him, so he steered wide of him and in the inky darkness fell over a basket of logs. The mishap wrung from him a very English expletive. Then he shouted on Mitri to bring a light.

He heard Maris's excited voice. "Who are you? Who in God's name are you? Are you English?"

"Of course I am English. Confound it, I believe I have cracked my shin. Mitri, you idiot, where are you?"

The old man appeared from a corridor with a lantern shaking in his hand. He had no words, but stared at the two as if he were looking on men risen from the dead.

"Where's your mistress? In her sitting-room? For God's sake, get me some clothes—my old ones, and bring something for this gentleman to put on. Any old thing will do. Get us some food, too, for we're starving. Quick, man. Leave the lantern here."

By the slender light, set on a table in the great stone hall, the two men regarded each other.

"You want to know who I am," said Vernon. "I'm an Englishman who came here three nights ago in a yacht. I happened to have met Miss Arabin before. I found out what the people of Plakos were up to, and it seemed to me, that the

best thing I could do was to win the race to-night. I needn't tell you about that, for you saw it. . . . Now for yourself. I gather that you also are unpopular in this island? "

Maris gave a short sketch of his career, and Vernon convinced himself by a few questions that he spoke the truth, for the Greek had served alongside the British at Salonika.

" I came here to protect the lady," Maris concluded.

" Who sent you ? "

" Mr. Ertzberger. I had a companion, an English colonel who is also in your Parliament, and a great milord. Leithen is his name."

" God bless my soul ! Leithen ! Oh, impossible ! Quick ! Tell me more. Where is he now ? "

" That I do not know. Yesterday evening we separated, each seeking to find some way of entering this House. I blundered badly, and was taken by the guards on the seaward front. My friend must also have failed, or he would be here, but I do not think he has been taken."

The knowledge that I was somewhere in the island gave Vernon, as he told me, a sudden acute sense of comfort. I must have been the visitor to the yacht. He cross-examined Maris, who knew nothing of the boat's existence, and Maris agreed that the stranger who had gone aboard must have been myself. " The Greek who was with him," he said, " was doubtless my corporal, Janni, the one man in my batch of fools who kept his head."

Mitri returned with Vernon's clothes, and an ancient dressing-gown for Maris. He also brought

a bowl of milk and some cakes and cheese. Questions trembled on his lips, but Vernon waved him off. "Go and tell your mistress that we will come to her in a quarter of an hour. And have a bed made ready for this gentleman."

As Vernon dressed he had a look at his companion, now grotesquely robed in a gown too large for him, and dirty and scratched from his adventures. It was the mercy of Providence that had given him such a colleague, for he liked the man's bold hard-bitten face and honest eyes. Here was a practical fellow, and he wanted something exceedingly prosaic and practical to counteract the awe which still hovered about his mind. He fought to keep at a distance the memory of the silence and the torches and the shining spaces of the Dancing Floor. This man did not look susceptible.

"I need not tell you that we are in the devil of a tight place, Captain Maris. Do you realise precisely the meaning of the performance we have just witnessed?"

Maris nodded. "Since yesterday. It has been most pointedly explained to me. I am one victim for the sacrifice, and the lady of this house is the other, and you are the priest."

"We have the better part of twenty-four hours' grace. After that?"

"After that this House will be burned. You may go forth, if you have the nerve to play the part. The lady and I—no. We are supposed to die when the fire begins, but if we do not die by your hand we will die in the flames."

"There is no way of escape?"

"None," said Maris cheerfully. "But with your

help I think we will do some mischief first. God's curse on the swine ! ”

“ And the lady ? ”

Maris shrugged his shoulders.

“ Till this evening,” said Vernon, “ I thought I had a plan. I was pretty certain I could win the race, and I proposed to reason with the male victim who came back with me, or club him on the head. I thought that when the fire began there would be confusion and that the people would keep outside the wall. My boat is lying below the cliffs and I hoped to carry the lady there. But now I know that that is impossible. There will be a concourse of the young men outside the door at the moment of the burning, and the House will be watched more closely than ever. Do you know what the people expect ? ”

Maris spat contemptuously. “ I heard some talk of the coming of Gods. The devil take all priests and their lying tales.”

“ They await the coming of Gods. You are not a classical scholar, Captain Maris, so you cannot realise, perhaps, just what that means. We are dealing with stark madness. These peasants are keyed up to a tremendous expectation. A belief has come to life, a belief far older than Christianity. They expect salvation from the coming of two Gods, a youth and a maiden. If their hope is disappointed, they will be worse madmen than before. To-morrow night nothing will go out from this place, unless it be Gods.”

“ That is true. The lady and I will without doubt die at the threshold, and you also, my friend. What arms have we ? ”

"I have this revolver with six cartridges. The lady has a toy pistol, but, I think, no ammunition. The men without are armed with rifles."

"Ugly odds. It is infamous that honest folk and soldiers should perish at the hands of the half-witted."

"What about Leithen? He is outside and has come here expressly to save the lady."

Maris shook his head. "He can do nothing. They have set up a cordon, a barrage, which he cannot penetrate. There is no hope in the island, for every man and woman is under the Devil's spell. Also the telegraph has been cut these three days."

"Do you see any chance?"

Maris cogitated. "We have twenty-four hours. Some way of escape might be found by an active man at the risk of a bullet or two. We might reach your boat."

"But the lady?"

"Why, no. Things look dark for the poor lady. We came here to protect her, and it seems as if we can do no more than die with her. . . . I would like to speak with that old man about clothes. A soldier does not feel at his bravest when he is barefoot and unclad save for pants and a ragged shirt. I refuse to go to Paradise in this dressing-gown."

Maris's cheerful fortitude was balm to Vernon's mind, for it seemed to strip the aura of mystery from the situation, and leave it a straight gamble of life and death. If Koré was to be saved it must be through Maris, for he himself was cast for another part.

"Come and let me present you to the lady," he said. "We must have some plan to sleep on."

Koré was in her sitting-room, and as she rose to meet them he saw that her face was very white.

"I heard nothing," she said hoarsely, "though Mitri says that there are thousands in the glade beyond the wall. But I saw a red glow from the upper windows."

"That was the torches which lined the stadium. I have been running a race, Miss Arabin, and have been lucky enough to win. Therefore we have still twenty-four hours of peace. May I present Captain Maris of the Greek Army? He asks me to apologise for his clothes."

The Greek bowed gallantly and kissed her hand.

"Captain Maris came here to protect you. He came with a friend of ours, Sir Edward Leithen."

"Sir Edward Leithen?" the girl cried. "He is here?"

"He is in the island, but he is unable to join us in the House. Captain Maris tried, and was unfortunately captured. He was handed over to me as the victor of the race, and that is why he is here. But Sir Edward must be still scouting around the outposts, and it is pretty certain that he won't find a way in. I'm afraid we must leave him out of account. . . . Now I want you to listen to me very carefully, for I've a good deal to say to you. I'm going to be perfectly candid, for you're brave enough to hear the worst."

Vernon constructed three cigarettes out of his pipe tobacco and tissue paper from the illustrations in Peter Beckford. Koré did not light hers, but sat waiting with her hands on her knees.

"They think you a witch, because of the habits of your family. That you have long known. In the past they have burned witches in these islands, and Plakos remembers it. But it remembers another thing—the ancient ritual I told you of, and that memory which has been sleeping for centuries has come to violent life. Perhaps it would not have mastered them if the mind of the people had not been full of witch-burning. That, you see, gave them one victim already chosen, and in Captain Maris, who is of their own race and also a stranger, they have found the other."

"I see all that," the girl said slowly. "Of course I did not know when I left London—I couldn't have guessed—I thought it was a simple business which only needed a bold front, and I was too vain to take advice. . . . Oh, forgive me. My vanity has brought two innocent people into my miserable troubles. . . ."

"I told you yesterday that we were going to win. You must trust me, Miss Arabin. And, for Heaven's sake, don't imagine that I blame you. I think you are the bravest thing God ever made. I wouldn't be elsewhere for worlds."

Her eyes searched his face closely, and then turned to Maris, who instantly adopted an air of bold insouciance.

"You are good men. . . . But what can you do? They will watch us like rats till the fire begins, and then—if we are not dead—they will kill us. . . . They will let no one go from this House—except their Gods."

These were the very words Vernon had used to

Maris, and since they so wholly expressed his own belief, he had to repudiate them with a vehement confidence.

"No," he said, "you forget that there are two things on our side. One is that, as the winner of the race, I am one of the people of Plakos. I can safely go out at the last moment and join their young men. I speak their tongue and I understand this ritual better than they do themselves. Surely I can find some way of driving them farther from the House so that in the confusion Maris can get you and your maid off unobserved. Mitri, too——"

"Mitri," she broke in, "has permission from our enemies to go when he pleases. But he refuses to leave us."

"Well, Mitri also. The second thing is that I have found my boat and got in touch with my man. He is lying in the bay below the cliffs, and I have arranged that on a certain signal he will meet you under the oliveyards. There is a gate in the wall there of which Mitri no doubt has the key. Once aboard, you are as safe as in London."

"And you?"

"Oh, I will take my chance. I am a hillman from Akte, and can keep up the part till I find some way of getting off."

"Impossible!" she cried. "When they find that their Gods have failed them they will certainly kill you. Perhaps it is because I was born here, but though I have only heard of this ritual from you, I feel somehow as if I had always known it. And I know that, if the one sacrifice fails, there will be another."

She rang the little silver bell for Mitri. "Show this gentleman his room," she looked towards Maris. "You have already had food? Good night, Captain Maris. You must have had a wearing day, and I order you to bed."

When they were alone she turned to Vernon. "Your plan will not work. I can make a picture of what will happen to-morrow night—I seem to see every detail clear, as if I had been through it all before—and your plan is hopeless. You cannot draw them away from the House. They will be watching like demented wolves. . . . And if you did and we escaped, what on earth would become of you?"

"I should be one of them—a sharer in their disappointment—probably forgotten."

"Not you. You are their high-priest, and an angry people always turns on their priest."

"There might be a bit of a row, but I dare say I could hold my own."

"Against thousands—mad thousands? You would be torn in pieces even though they still believed you were a hillman from Akte."

"I'll take the risk. It is no good making difficulties, Miss Arabin. I admit that the case is pretty desperate, but my plan has at any rate a chance."

"The case is utterly desperate, and that is why your plan is no good. Desperate cases need more desperate remedies."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

She smiled. "You are very tired and so am I. We have a day and a night left us and we can talk in the morning. . . . I told you when you first came

here that I refused to run away. Well, I—don't—think—I have changed my mind. . . ."

The difficulty of telling this part of the story (said Leithen) is that it must be largely guess-work. The main facts I know, but the affair had become so strange and intimate that neither Koré nor Vernon would speak of it, while Maris was only vaguely aware of what was happening. It must have been some time on the Friday morning that the two met again. I can picture Vernon racking his brains to supplement his fragile plan, turning sleeplessly in his bed, hunting out Maris in the early morn to go wearily over the slender chances. Koré, I imagine, slept dreamlessly. She had reached her decision, and to her strong and simple soul to be resolved was to be at peace. Vernon was a fine fellow—I have known few finer—but there were lumpish elements in him, while the girl was all pure spirit.

But I can reconstruct the meeting of the two in the bare little sitting-room—without Maris—for that much Vernon has told me. I can see Vernon's anxious face, and the girl's eyes bright with that innocent arrogance which once in my haste I had thought ill-breeding.

"I am not going to run away from my people," she said. "I am going to meet them."

Vernon asked her meaning and she replied :

"I said yesterday that no one would be permitted to leave the House, unless in the eyes of the watchers they were Gods. Well, the Gods will not fail them. . . . Listen to me. I have tried to purify this place, but there can be only one purification

and that is by fire. It had to come, and it seems to me right that it should come from the hands of those who have suffered. After that I go out as a free woman—and to a free woman nothing is impossible.”

I think that for a little he may not have understood her. His mind, you see, had been busy among small particulars, and the simplicity of her plan would not at once be comprehended. Then there came for him that moment of liberation, when the world clarifies and what have been barrier mountains become only details in a wide prospect. The extreme of boldness is seen to be the true discretion, and with that mood comes a sharp uplift of spirit.

“You are right,” he cried. “We will give them their Gods.”

“Gods?” She stopped him. “But I must go alone. You have no part in this trial. But if I win, all this household will be safe. Most of these people have never seen me, and Kynætho knows me only as a girl in old country clothes from whom they kept their eyes averted. I can dress for a different part, and they will see some one who will be as new to them as if the Panagia had come down from Heaven. But you——”

“They will not be content with one divinity,” he broke in. “They await a double epiphany, remember—the Koré and the Kouros. That is the point of the occasion. We must be faithful to the letter of the rite. After all they know less of me than of you. They saw me win a race, a figure very much like the others in the moonlight. . . . To those who may recognise me I am an unknown

hillman of Akte. Why should not the Kouros have revealed himself the day before, and be also the Basileus? "

She looked at him curiously as if seeing him for the first time as a bodily presence. I can fancy that for the first time she may have recognised his beauty and strength.

"But you are not like me," she urged. "You have not an old burden to get rid of. I am shaking off the incubus of my youth, and going free, like the Gods. What you call the epiphany is not only for Plakos but for myself, and nothing matters, not even death. I can play the part, but can you? To me it is going to be the beginning of life, but to you it can only be an adventure. Chivalry is not enough."

"To me also it is the beginning of life," he answered. Then he returned to the tale of his boyhood's dream. "When it vanished in the storm a few nights ago I hated it, for I felt that it had stolen years from my life. But now I know that nothing is wasted. The door of the last of the dream-rooms has opened and you have come in. And we are going to begin life—together."

A strange pair of lovers, between whom no word of love had yet been spoken! By very different roads both had reached a complete assurance, and with it came exhilaration and ease of mind. Maris during the long spring day might roam about restlessly, and Mitri and Élise fall to their several prayers, but Vernon and Koré had no doubts. While I, outside the wall, was at the mercy of old magics, a mere piece of driftwood tossed upon

undreamed-of tides, the two in the House had almost forgotten Plakos. It had become to them no more than a background for their own overmastering private concerns. The only problem was for their own hearts; for Koré to shake off for good the burden of her past and vindicate her fiery purity, that virginity of the spirit which could not be smirched by man or matter; for Vernon to open the door at which he had waited all his life and redeem the long preparation of his youth. They had followed each their own paths of destiny, and now these paths had met and must run together. That was the kind of thing that could not be questioned, could not even be thought about; it had to be accepted, like the rising sun. I do not think that they appreciated their danger, as I did, for they had not been, like me, down in the shadows. They were happy in their half-knowledge, and in that blessed pre-occupation which casts out fear.

But some time in the afternoon he drew for the girl a picture of the ancient rite, and he must have been inspired, for, as she once recounted it to me, he seems to have made his book-learning like the tale of an eye-witness.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked.

"Because if we are to play our part we must understand that there is beauty as well as terror in this worship."

"You speak as if you were a believer."

He laughed. "There is truth in every religion that the heart of man has conceived. It is because of that that we shall win."

But I think his confidence was less complete

than hers. I judge from what Maris told me that, though Vernon was what the Scots call "fey" during those last hours, he retained something of his old careful prevision. As the twilight fell he took Maris aside and gave him his pistol. "Mitri has orders as soon as he gets out of the House to take a lantern to the cliffs and make the signal for my boat. He has a key and will open the door in the oliveyard wall. Miss Arabin and I are staking everything on a mighty gamble. If it succeeds, I think that the people will be in a stupor and we shall have an opportunity to join you. But if it fails—well, they will tear us to pieces. You must be close to us and await events. If the worst happens, one of these bullets is for the lady. Swear to me on your honour as a soldier."

XXVIII: EPIPHANY

I TAKE up the tale now (said Leithen) at the point where I fell in with Maris in the avenue which led to the gap in the wall. As I have told you, I had stumbled through the undergrowth with the blazing House making the place an inferno of blood-red aisles and purple thickets. Above the roar of the flames I heard the noise of panic-driven feet, of men plunging in haste—two indeed I had met, who seemed to be in the extremity of fear. For myself I was pretty nearly at the end of my tether. I was doddering with fatigue, and desperate with anxiety, and the only notion in my head was to use the dregs of my strength to do something violent. I was utterly in the dark, too. I did not know but that Koré might be already

beyond my help, for that crimson grove seemed to reek of death.

And then I blundered into Maris, saw something in his face which gave me a surge of hope, and with his hand on my arm turned my eyes up the avenue.

The back part of the House and the outbuildings were by this time one roaring gust of flame, but the front was still untouched, and the fan of fire behind it gave it the concave darkness of a shell—a purple dark which might at any moment burst into light. The glow beyond the façade was reflected farther down the avenue, which was as bright as day, but the House end was shadowed, and the two figures which I saw seemed to be emerging from a belt of blackness between two zones of raw gold. I therefore saw them first as two dim white forms, which, as they moved, caught tints of flame. . . .

Put it down to fatigue, if you like, or to natural stupidity, but I did not recognise them. Besides, you see, I knew nothing of Vernon's presence there. My breath stopped and I felt my heart leap to my throat. What I saw seemed not of the earth—immortals, whether from Heaven or Hell, coming out of the shadows and the fire in white garments, beings that no elements could destroy. In that moment the most panicky of the guards now fleeing from the demesne was no more abject believer than I.

And then another fugitive barged into me, and Maris caught him by the arm and cuffed his ears. I saw that it was Janni, but the sight meant nothing to me. The corporal seemed to be

whimpering with terror, and Maris talked fiercely to him, but I did not listen. He quieted him, and then he took us both by an arm and hurried us with him towards the gap. It was what I wanted to do. I dared not look again on that burning pageant.

The next I knew I was beyond the wall on the edge of the Dancing Floor. I do not know how I got there, for my legs seemed to have no power in them, and I fancy that Maris dragged us both. The scared guards must have preceded us, for behind was emptiness, save for the presences in the avenue. The thick trees partly blanketed the fire, but the light from the burning roof fell beyond them and lit up redly the scarp on which we stood. A rival light, too, was coming into being. The rising moon had already flooded the far hills, and its calm radiance was sweeping over the hollow packed with the waiting multitude.

At first I saw only the near fringes of the people—upturned faces in the uncanny light of the fire. But as I looked, the unfeatured darkness beyond changed also into faces—faces spectral in the soft moonshine. I seemed to be standing between two worlds, one crimson with terror and the other golden with a stranger spell, but both far removed from the kindly works of men.

Maris had pulled us aside out of the line of the breach in the wall, where the avenue made a path for the glow of the fire. We were in full view of the people, but they had no eyes for us, for their gaze was concentrated on the breach. The fugitive guards had by this time been absorbed, and their panic had not communicated itself to the

great multitude. For a second I forgot my own fears in the amazing sight before me. . . . The crowded Dancing Floor was silent; in face of that deep stillness the crackle and roar of the fire seemed no more than the beating of waves on a far-away coast. Though the moon made the hills yellow as corn, it left the upturned faces pale. I was looking down on a sea of white faces—featureless to me, masks of strained expectation. I felt the influence from them beat upon me like a wind. The fierce concentration of mingled hope and fear—wild hope, wilder fear—surged up to me, and clutched at my nerves and fired my brain. For a second I was as exalted as the craziest of them. Fragments of the dithyramb which Vernon had translated came unbidden to my lips—"Io, Kouros most great. . . . Come, O come, and bring with thee—holy hours of thy most holy Spring."

The spell of the waiting people made me turn, as they had turned, to the gap in the wall. Through it, to the point where the glow of the conflagration mingled with the yellow moonlight, came the two figures.

I think I would have dropped on my knees, but that Maris fetched me a clout on the back, and his exultant voice cried in my ear. "Bravo," he cried. "By the Mother of God, they win! That is a great little lady!"

There was something in the familiarity, the friendly roughness of the voice which broke the spell. I suddenly looked with seeing eyes, and I saw Koré.

She was dressed in white, the very gown which

had roused Vernon's ire at my cousin's dance the summer before. A preposterous garment I had thought it, the vagary of an indecent fashion. But now—ah now! It seemed the fitting robe for youth and innocence—divine youth, heavenly innocence—clothing but scarcely veiling the young Grace who walked like Persephone among the spring meadows. *Vera incessu patuit Dea*. It was not Koré I was looking at, but *the* Koré, the immortal Maiden, who brings to the earth its annual redemption.

I was a sane man once more, and filled with another kind of exaltation. I have never felt so sharp a sense of joy. God had not failed us. I knew that Koré was now not only safe but triumphant.

And then I recognised Vernon.

I did not trouble to think by what mad chance he had come there. It seemed wholly right that he should be there. He was dressed like the runner of the day before, but at the moment I did not connect the two. What I was looking at was an incarnation of something that mankind has always worshipped—youth rejoicing to run its race, that youth which is the security of this world's continuance and the earnest of Paradise.

I recognised my friends and yet I did not recognise them, for they were transfigured. In a flash of insight I understood that it was not the Koré and the Vernon that I had known, but new creations. They were not acting a part, but living it. They, too, were believers; they had found their own epiphany, for they had found themselves and each other. Each other! How I knew it I

do not know, but I realised that it was two lovers that stood on the brink of the Dancing Floor. And I felt a great glow of peace and happiness.

With that I could face the multitude once more. And then I saw the supreme miracle.

People talk about the psychology of a crowd, how it is different in kind from the moods of the men who compose it. I dare say that is true, but if you have each individual strained to the extreme of tension with a single hope, the mood of the whole is the same as that of the parts, only multiplied a thousandfold. And if the nerve of a crowd goes, there is a vast cracking, just as the rending of a tree-trunk is greater than the breaking of a twig.

For a second—not more—the two figures stood on the edge of the Dancing Floor in the sight of the upturned eyes. I do not think that Koré and Vernon saw anything—they had their own inward vision. I do not know what the people saw in the presences that moved out of the darkness above them.

But this I saw. Over the multitude passed a tremor like a wind in a field of wheat. Instead of a shout of triumph there was a low murmur as of a thousand sighs. And then there came a surge, men and women stumbling in terror. First the fringes opened and thinned, and in another second, as it seemed to me, the whole mass was in precipitate movement. And then it became panic—naked veritable panic. The silence was broken by hoarse cries of fear. I saw men running like hares on the slopes of the Dancing Floor. I saw women dragging their children as if fleeing from a

pestilence. . . . In a twinkling I was looking down on an empty glade with the Spring of the White Cypress black and solitary in the moonlight.

I did not doubt what had happened. The people of Plakos had gone after strange gods, but it was only for a short season that they could shake themselves free from the bonds of a creed which they had held for a thousand years. The resurgence of ancient faiths had obsessed but had not destroyed the religion into which they had been born. Their spells had been too successful. They had raised the Devil and now fled from him in the blindest terror. They had sought the outlands, had felt their biting winds, had had a glimpse of their awful denizens, and they longed with the passion of children for their old homely shelters. The priest of Kynætho would presently have his fill of stricken penitents.

Maris was laughing. I dare say it was only a relief from nervous strain, but it seemed to me an impiety. I turned on him angrily. "There's a boat somewhere. See that everybody is aboard—the whole household. And bring it round to the harbour where we first landed."

"Not to the oliveyards?" he asked.

"No, you fool. To the harbour. Plakos is now as safe for us as the streets of Athens."

Koré and Vernon stood hand in hand like people in a dream. I think they were already dimly aware of what had happened, and were slowly coming back to the ordinary world. The virtue was going out of them, and with the ebbing of their exaltation came an immense fatigue. I never saw human faces so pale.

Vernon was the first to recover. He put his arm round Koré's waist, for without it she would have fallen, but he himself was none too steady on his feet. He recognised me.

"Ned," he said, in a stammering voice, like a sleep-walker's. "I heard you were here. It was good of you, old man. . . . What do you think . . . now . . . the boat . . ."

"Come along," I cried, and I took an arm of each. "The sooner you are on board the better. You want to sleep for a week." I started them off along the edge of the Dancing Floor.

"Not that way," he gasped. "Too risky . . ."

"There is no danger anywhere in this blessed island. Come along. You want food and clothes. It's getting on for midnight and you're both only half-dressed."

They were like two children pulled out of bed and too drowsy to walk, and I had my work cut out getting them along the ridge. The Dancing Floor was empty, and when we entered the road which led from Kynætho to the main gate of the House there was also solitude. Indeed, we had to pass through a segment of the village itself, and the place was silent as the grave. I knew where the people were—in and around the church, grovelling in the dust for their sins.

Our going was so slow that by the time we looked down on the harbour the boat was already there. I stopped for a moment and glanced back, for far behind me I heard voices. There was a glow as from torches to the south where the church stood, and a murmur which presently swelled into an excited clamour. Suddenly a bell began to

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ring, and it seemed as if the noise became antiphonal, voices speaking and others replying. At that distance I could make out nothing, but I knew what the voices said. It was "Christ is risen—He is risen indeed."

The moon had set before we put to sea. My last recollection of Plakos is looking back and seeing the House flaming like a pharos on its headland. Then, as we beat outward with the wind, the fire became a mere point of brightness seen at a great distance in the vault of night.

I had no wish or power to sleep. Koré and Vernon, wrapped each in a heap of cloaks, lay in the bows. It was the quietest place, but there was no need of precautions, for they slept like the drugged. Élise, whose nerves had broken down, was in Vernon's berth, Black George had the helm, and old Mitri and Janni snored beside him.

I sat amidships and smoked. When the moon went down, a host of stars came out, pale and very remote as they always seem in a spring sky. The wind was light and the water slid smoothly past; I knew roughly our bearings, but I had a sense of being in another world and on seas never before sailed by man. The last week had been for me a time of acute anxiety and violent bodily exertion, but a sponge seemed to have passed over the memory of it. Something altogether different filled my mind. I had with my own eyes seen Fate take a hand in the game and move the pieces on the board. The two sleepers in the bows had trusted their destiny and had not been betrayed.

I thought with contrition of my cynicism about Vernon's dream. No doubt it had been a will-o'-the-wisp, but it had been true in purpose, for it had made him wait, alert and aware, on something which had been prepared for him, and if that something was far different from his forecast the long expectation had made him ready to seize it. How otherwise could he, with his decorous ancestry and his prudent soul, have become an adventurer? . . . And Koré? She had stood grimly to the duty which she conceived Fate to have laid upon her, and Fate, after piling the odds against her, had relented. Perhaps that is the meaning of courage. It wrestles with circumstance, like Jacob with the angel, till it compels its antagonist to bless it.

I remembered a phrase which Vernon had once used about "the mailed virgin." It fitted this girl, and I began to realise the meaning of virginity. True purity, I thought, whether in woman or man, was something far more than the narrow sex thing which was the common notion of it. It meant keeping oneself, as the Bible says, altogether unspotted from the world, free from all tyranny and stain, whether of flesh or spirit, defying the universe to touch even the outworks of the sanctuary which is one's soul. It must be defiant, not the inert fragile crystal, but the supple shining sword. Virginity meant nothing unless it was mailed, and I wondered whether we were not coming to a better understanding of it. The modern girl, with all her harshness, had the gallantry of a free woman. She was a crude Artemis, but her feet were on the hills. Was the

blushing sheltered maid of our grandmother's day no more than an untempted Aphrodite?

These were queer reflections, I know, for a man like me, but they gave me contentment, as if I had somehow made my peace with life. For a long time I listened to the ripple of the water and watched the sky lighten to dim grey and the east flush with sunrise. It had become very cold and I was getting sleepy, so I hunted about for a mattress to make myself a bed. But a thought made me pause. How would these two, who had come together out of the night, shake down on the conventional roads of marriage? To the end of time the desire of a woman should be to her husband. Would Koré's eyes, accustomed to look so masterfully at life, ever turn to Vernon in the surrender of wifely affection? As I looked at the two in the bows I wondered.

Then something happened which reassured me. The girl stirred uneasily as if in a bad dream, turned to where Vernon lay, and flung out her hand. Both were sound asleep, but in some secret way the impulse must have been communicated to Vernon, for he moved on his side, and brought an arm, which had been lying loosely on the rug which covered him, athwart Koré's in a gesture of protection.

After that both seemed to be at peace, while the yawl ran towards the mainland hills, now green as a fern in the spring dawn.

2nd year

JOHN MACNAB

Colleague

JOHN MACNAB

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XXIX : IN WHICH THREE GENTLEMEN CONFESS
THEIR ENNUI

THE great doctor stood on the hearth-rug looking down at his friend who sprawled before him in an easy-chair. It was a hot day in early July, and the windows were closed and the blinds half-down to keep out the glare and the dust. The standing figure had bent shoulders, a massive clean-shaven face, and a keen interrogatory air, and might have passed his sixtieth birthday. He looked like a distinguished lawyer, who would soon leave his practice for the Bench. But it was the man in the chair who was the lawyer, a man who had left forty behind him, but was still on the pleasant side of fifty.

"I tell you for the tenth time that there's nothing the matter with you."

"And I tell you for the tenth time that I'm miserably ill."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Then it's a mind diseased, to which I don't propose to minister. What do you say is wrong?"

"Simply what my housekeeper calls a 'no-how' feeling."

"It's clearly nothing physical. Your heart and lungs are sound. Your digestion's as good as anybody's can be in London in Midsummer. Your nerves—well, I've tried all the stock tests, and they appear to be normal."

"Oh, my nerves are all right," said the other wearily.

"Your brain seems good enough, except for this dismal obsession that you are ill. I can find no earthly thing wrong, except that you're stale. I don't say run-down, for that you're not. You're stale in mind. You want a holiday."

"I don't. I may *need* one, but I don't *want* it. That's precisely the trouble. I used to be a glutton for holidays, and spent my leisure moments during term planning what I was going to do. Now there seems to be nothing in the world I want to do—neither work nor play."

"Try fishing. You used to be keen."

"I've killed all the salmon I mean to kill. I never want to look the ugly brutes in the face again."

"Shooting?"

"Too easy and too dull."

"A yacht."

"Stop it, old fellow. Your catalogue of undesired delights only makes it worse. I tell you that there's nothing at this moment which has the slightest charm for me. I'm bored with my work, and I can't think of anything else of any kind for which I would cross the street. I don't even want to go into the country and sleep. It's been coming on for a long time—I daresay it's due somehow to the war—but when I was in office I did not feel it so badly, for I was in a service and not my own master. Now I've nothing to do except to earn an enormous income, which I haven't any need for. Work comes rolling in—I've got retainers for nearly every solvent concern in this land—and all that happens is that I want to strangle my clerk

and a few eminent solicitors. I don't care a tinker's curse for success, and what is worse, I'm just as apathetic about the modest pleasures which used to enliven my life."

"You may be more tired than you think."

"I'm not tired at all." The speaker rose from his chair, yawning, and walked to the window to stare into the airless street. He did not look tired, for his movements were vigorous, and, though his face had the slight pallor of his profession, his eye was clear and steady. He turned round suddenly.

"I tell you what I've got. It's what the Middle Ages suffered from—I read a book about it the other day—and it's called *tædium vitæ*. It's a special kind of ennui. I can diagnose my ailment well enough, and Shakespeare has the words for it. I've come to a pitch where I find 'nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon.'"

"Then why do you come to me, if the trouble is not with your body?"

"Because you're *you*. I should come to you just the same if you were a vet., or a bone-setter, or a Christian Scientist. I want your advice, not as a fashionable consultant, but as an old friend and a wise man. It's a state of affairs that can't go on. What am I to do to get rid of this infernal disillusionment? I can't go through the rest of life dragging my wing."

The doctor was smiling.

"If you ask my professional advice," he said, "I am bound to tell you that medical science has no suggestion to offer. If you consult me as a friend, I advise you to steal a horse in some part of the world where a horse-thief is usually hanged."

The other considered. "Pretty drastic prescription for a man who has been a Law Officer of the Crown."

"I speak figuratively. You've got to rediscover the comforts of your life by losing them for a little. You have good food and all the rest of it at your command—well, you've got to be in want for a bit to appreciate them. You're secure and respected and rather eminent—well, somehow or other get under the weather. If you could induce the newspapers to accuse you of something shady and have the devil of a job to clear yourself it might do the trick. The fact is, you've grown too competent. You need to be made to struggle for your life again—your life or your reputation. You have to find out the tonic of difficulty, and you can't find it in your profession. Therefore I say 'Steal a horse.'"

A faint interest appeared in the other's eyes.

"That sounds to me good sense. But, hang it all, it's utterly unpractical. I can't go looking for scrapes. I should feel like play-acting if in cold blood I got myself into difficulties, and I take it that the essence of your prescription is that I must feel desperately in earnest."

"I'm not prescribing. Heaven forbid that I should advise a friend to look for trouble. I'm merely stating how in the abstract I regard your case."

The patient rose to go. "Miserable comforters are ye all," he groaned. "Well, it appears you can do nothing for me except to suggest the advisability of crime. I suppose it's no good trying to make you take a fee?"

The doctor shook his head. "I wasn't altogether chaffing. Honestly, you would be the better of dropping for a month or two into another world—a harder one. A hand on a cattle-boat, for instance."

Sir Edward Leithen sighed deeply as he turned from the doorstep down the long hot street. He did not look behind him, or he would have seen another gentleman approach cautiously round the corner of a side-street, and, when the coast was clear, ring the doctor's bell. He was so completely fatigued with life that he neglected to be cautious at crossings, as was his habit, and was all but slain by a motor-omnibus. Everything seemed weary and over-familiar—the summer smell of town, the din of traffic, the panorama of faces, pretty women shopping, the occasional sight of a friend. Long ago, he reflected with disgust, there had been a time when he had enjoyed it all.

He found sanctuary at last in the shade and coolness of his club. He remembered that he was dining out, and bade the porter telephone that he could not come, giving no reason. He remembered, too, that there was a division in the House that night, an important division advertised by a three-line whip. He declined to go near the place. At any rate, he would have the dim consolation of behaving badly. His clerk was probably at the moment hunting feverishly for him, for he had missed a consultation in the great Argentine bank case which was in the paper next morning. That also could slide. He wanted, nay, he was determined, to make a mess of it.

Then he discovered that he was hungry, and that

it was nearly the hour when a man may dine. "I've only one positive feeling left," he told himself, "the satisfaction of my brute needs. Nice position for a gentleman and a Christian!"

There was one other man in the dining-room, sitting at the little table in the window. At first sight he had the look of an undergraduate, a Rugby Blue, perhaps, who had just come down from the University, for he had the broad, slightly stooped shoulders of the football-player. He had a ruddy face, untidy sandy hair, and large reflective grey eyes. It was those eyes which declared his age, for round them were the many fine wrinkles which come only from the passage of time.

"Hullo, John," said Leithen. "May I sit at your table?"

The other, whose name was Palliser-Yeates, nodded. "You may certainly eat in my company, but I've got nothing to say to you, Ned. I'm feeling as dried-up as a dead starfish."

They ate their meal in silence, and so preoccupied was Sir Edward Leithen with his own affairs that it did not seem to him strange that Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who was commonly a person of robust spirits and plentiful conversation, should have the air of a deaf-mute. When they had reached the fish, two other diners took their seats and waved them a greeting. One of them was a youth with lean, high-coloured cheeks who limped slightly; the other a tallish older man with a long dark face, a small dark moustache, and a neat pointed chin which gave him something of the air of a hidalgo. He looked weary and glum, but his companion seemed to be in the best of tempers, for

his laugh rang out in that empty place with a startling boyishness. Mr. Palliser-Yeates looked up angrily, with a shiver.

"Noisy brute, Archie Roylance!" he observed. "I suppose he's above himself since Ascot. His horse won some beastly race, didn't it? It's a good thing to be young and an ass."

There was that in his tone which roused Leithen from his apathy. He cast a sharp glance at the other's face.

"You're off-colour."

"No," said the other brusquely. "I'm perfectly fit. Only I'm getting old."

This was food for wonder, inasmuch as Mr. Palliser-Yeates had a reputation for a more than youthful energy and, although forty-five years of age, was still accustomed to do startling things on the Chamonix *aiguilles*. He was head of an eminent banking firm and something of an authority on the aberrations of post-war finance.

A gleam of sympathy came into Leithen's eyes.

"How does it take you?" he asked.

"I've lost zest. Everything seems more or less dust and ashes. When you suddenly wake up and find that you've come to regard your respectable colleagues as so many fidgety old women, and the job you've given your life to as an infernal squabble about trifles—why, you begin to wonder what's going to happen."

"I suppose a holiday ought to happen."

"The last thing I want. That's my complaint. I have no desire to do anything, work or play, and yet I'm not tired—only bored."

Leithen's sympathy had become interest.

"Have you seen a doctor?"

The other hesitated. "Yes," he said at length. "I saw old Acton Croke this afternoon. He was no earthly use. He advised me to go to Moscow and fix up a trade agreement. He thought that might make me content with my present lot."

"He told *me* to steal a horse."

Mr. Palliser-Yeates stared in extreme surprise. "You! Do you feel the same way? Have you been to Croke?"

"Three hours ago. I thought he talked good sense. He said I must get into a rougher life so as to appreciate the blessings of the life that I'm fed up with. Probably he is right, but you can't take that sort of step in cold blood."

Mr. Palliser-Yeates assented. The fact of having found an associate in misfortune seemed to enliven slightly, very slightly, the spirits of both. From the adjoining table came, like an echo from a happier world, the ringing voice and hearty laughter of youth. Leithen jerked his head towards them.

"I would give a good deal for Archie's gusto," he said. "My sound right leg, for example. Or, if I couldn't get that, I'd like Charles Lamanca's insatiable ambition. If you want as much as he wants, you don't suffer from tedium."

Palliser-Yeates looked at the gentleman in question, the tall dark one of the two diners. "I'm not so sure. Perhaps he has got too much too easily. He has come on uncommon quick, you know, and, if you do that, there's apt to arrive a moment when you flag."

Lord Lamanca—the title had no connection

with Don Quixote and Spain, but was the name of a shieling in a Border glen which had been the home six centuries ago of the ancient house of Merkland—was an object of interest to many of his countrymen. The Marquis of Liddesdale, his father, was a hale old man who might reasonably be expected to live for another ten years and so prevent his son's career being compromised by a premature removal to the House of Lords. He had a safe seat for a London division, was a member of the Cabinet, and had a high reputation for the matter-of-fact oratory which has replaced the pre-war grandiloquence. People trusted him, because, in spite of his hidalgo-ish appearance, he was believed to have that combination of candour and intelligence which England desires in her public men. Also he was popular, for his record in the war and the rumour of a youth spent in adventurous travel touched the imagination of the ordinary citizen. At the moment he was being talked of for a great Imperial post which was soon to become vacant, and there was gossip, in the alternative, of a Ministerial readjustment which would make him the pivot of a controversial Government. It was a remarkable position for a man to have won in his early forties, who had entered public life with every disadvantage of birth.

"I suppose he's happy," said Leithen. "But I've always held that there was a chance of Charles kicking over the traces. I doubt if his ambition is an organic part of him and not stuck on with pins. There's a fundamental daftness in all Merklands. I remember him at school."

The two men finished their meal and retired to

the smoking-room, where they drank their coffee abstractedly. Each was thinking about the other, and wondering what light the other's case could shed on his own. The speculation gave each a faint glimmer of comfort.

Presently the voice of Sir Archibald Roylance was heard, and that ebullient young man flung himself down on a sofa beside Leithen, while Lord Lamancha selected a cigar. Sir Archie settled his game leg to his satisfaction, and filled an ancient pipe.

"Heavy weather," he announced. "I've been trying to cheer up old Charles and it's been like casting a fly against a thirty-mile gale. I can't make out what's come over him. Here's a deserving lad like me struggling at the foot of the ladder and not cast down, and there's Charles high up on the top rungs as glum as an owl and declaring that the whole thing's foolishness. Shocking spectacle for youth."

Lamancha, who had found an arm-chair beside Palliser-Yeates, looked at the others and smiled wryly.

"Is that true, Charles?" Leithen asked. "Are you also feeling hipped? Because John and I have just been confessing to each other that we're more fed up with everything in this gay world than we've ever been before in our useful lives."

Lamancha nodded. "I don't know what has come over me. I couldn't face the House to-night, so I telephoned to Archie to come and cheer me. I suppose I'm stale, but it's a new kind of staleness, for I'm perfectly fit in body, and I can't honestly say I feel weary in mind. It's simply that the

light has gone out of the landscape. Nothing has any savour."

The three men had been at school together, they had been contemporaries at the University, and close friends ever since. They had no secrets from each other. Leithen, into whose face and voice had come a remote hint of interest, gave a sketch of his own mood, and the diagnosis of the eminent consultant. Archie Roylance stared blankly from one to the other, as if some new thing had broken in upon his simple philosophy of life.

"You fellows beat me," he cried. "Here you are, every one of you a swell of sorts, with everything to make you cheerful, and you're grouching like a labour battalion! You should be jolly well ashamed of yourselves. It's fairly tempting Providence. What you want is some hard exercise. Go and sweat ten hours a day on a steep hill, and you'll get rid of these notions."

"My dear Archie," said Leithen, "your prescription is too crude. I used to be fond enough of sport, but I wouldn't stir a foot to catch a sixty-pound salmon or kill a fourteen pointer. I don't want to. I see no fun in it. I'm *blasé*. It's too easy."

"Well, I'm dashed! You're the worst spoiled chap I ever heard of, and a nice example to democracy." Archie spoke as if his gods had been blasphemed.

"Democracy, anyhow, is a good example to us. I know now why workmen strike sometimes and can't give any reason. We're on strike—against our privileges."

Archie was not listening. "Too easy, you say?"

he repeated. "I call that pretty fair conceit. I've seen you miss birds often enough, old fellow."

"Nevertheless, it seems to me too easy. Everything has become too easy, both work and play."

"You can screw up the difficulty, you know. Try shooting with a twenty bore, or fishing for salmon with a nine-foot rod and a dry-fly cast."

"I don't want to kill anything," said Palliser-Yeates. "I don't see the fun of it."

Archie was truly shocked. Then a light of reminiscence came into his eye. "You remind me of poor old Jim Tarras," he said thoughtfully.

There were no inquiries about Jim Tarras, so Archie volunteered further news.

"You remember Jim? He had a little place somewhere in Moray, and spent most of his time shooting in East Africa. Poor chap, he went back there with Smuts in the war and perished of black-water. Well, when his father died and he came home to settle down, he found it an uncommon dull job. So, to enliven it, he invented a new kind of sport. He knew all there was to be known about *shikar*, and from tramping about the Highlands he had a pretty accurate knowledge of the country-side. So he used to write to the owner of a deer forest and present his compliments, and beg to inform him that between certain dates he proposed to kill one of his stags. When he had killed it he undertook to deliver it to the owner, for he wasn't a thief."

"I call that poaching on the grand scale," observed Palliser-Yeates.

"Wasn't it? Most of the fellows he wrote to accepted his challenge and told him to come and

do his damndest. Little Avington, I remember, turned on every man and boy about the place for three nights to watch the forest. Jim usually worked by night, you see. One or two curmudgeons talked of the police and prosecuting him, but public opinion was against them—too dashed unsporting.”

“Did he always get his stag?” Leithen asked.

“In-var-i-ably, and got it off the ground and delivered it to the owner, for that was the rule of the game. Sometimes he had a precious near squeak, and Avington, who was going off his head at the time, tried to pot him—shot a gillie in the leg too. But Jim always won out. I should think he was the best *shikari* God ever made.”

“Is that true, Archie?” Lamanha’s voice had a magisterial tone.

“True—as—true. I know all about it, for Wattie Lithgow, who was Jim’s man, is with me now. He and his wife keep house for me at Crask. Jim never took but the one man with him, and that was Wattie, and he made him just about as cunning an old dodger as himself.”

Leithen yawned. “What sort of a place is Crask?” he inquired.

“Tiny little place. No fishing except some hill lochs and only rough shooting. I take it for the birds. Most marvellous nesting ground in Britain barring some of the Outer Islands. I don’t know why it should be, but it is. Something to do with the Gulf Stream, maybe. Anyhow, I’ve got the greenshank breeding regularly and the red-throated diver, and half a dozen rare duck. It’s a marvellous stopping place in spring too, for birds going north.”

"Are you much there?"

"Generally in April, and always from the middle of August till the middle of October. You see, it's about the only place I know where you can do exactly as you like. The house is stuck away up on a long slope of moor, and you see the road for a mile from the windows, so you've plenty of time to take to the hills if anybody comes to worry you. I roost there with old Sime, my butler, and the two Lithgows, and put up a pal now and then who likes the life. It's the jolliest bit of the year for me."

"Have you any neighbours?"

"Heaps, but they don't trouble me much. Crask's the earthenware pot among the brazen vessels—mighty hard to get to and nothing to see when you get there. So the brazen vessels keep to themselves."

Lamancha went to a shelf of books above a writing-table and returned with an atlas. "Who are your brazen vessels?" he asked.

"Well, my brassiest is old Claybody at Haripol—that's four miles off across the hill."

"Bit of a swine, isn't he?" said Leithen.

"Oh, no. He's rather a good old bird himself. Don't care so much for his family. Then there's Glenraden t'other side of the Larrig"—he indicated a point on the map which Lamancha was studying—"with a real old Highland grandee living in it—Alastair Raden—commanded the Scots Guards, I believe, in the year One. Family as old as the Flood and very poor, but just manage to hang on. He's the last Raden that will live there, but that doesn't matter so much as he has no son

—only a brace of daughters. Then, of course, there's the show place, Strathlarrig—horrible great house as large as a factory, but wonderful fine salmon-fishing. Some Americans have got it this year—Boston or Philadelphia, I don't remember which—very rich and said to be rather high-brow. There's a son, I believe."

Lamancha closed the atlas.

"Do you know any of these people, Archie?" he asked.

"Only the Claybodys—very slightly. I stayed with them in Suffolk for a covert shoot two years ago. The Radens have been to call on me, but I was out. The Bandicotts—that's the Americans—are new this year."

"Is the sport good?"

"The very best. Haripol is about the steepest and most sporting forest in the Highlands, and Glenraden is nearly as good. There's no forest at Strathlarrig, but, as I've told you, amazing good salmon fishing. For a west coast river, I should put the Larrig only second to the Laxford."

Lamancha consulted the atlas again and appeared to ponder. Then he lifted his head, and his long face, which had a certain heaviness and sullenness in repose, was now lit by a smile which made it handsomer and younger.

"Could you have me at Crask this autumn?" he asked. "My wife has to go to Aix for a cure and I have no plans after the House rises."

"I should jolly well think so," cried Archie. "There's heaps of room in the old house, and I promise you I'll make you comfortable. Look here, you fellows! Why shouldn't all three of you

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come? I can get in a couple of extra maids from Inverlarrig."

"Excellent idea," said Lamancha. "But you mustn't bother about the maids. I'll bring my own man, and we'll have a male establishment, except for Mrs. Lithgow. . . . By the way, I suppose you can count on Mrs. Lithgow?"

"How do you mean, 'count'?" asked Archie, rather puzzled. Then a difficulty struck him. "But wouldn't you be bored? I can't show you much in the way of sport, and you're not naturalists like me. It's a quiet life, you know."

"I shouldn't be bored," said Lamancha. "I should take steps to prevent it."

Leithen and Palliser-Yeates seemed to divine his intention, for they simultaneously exclaimed.— "It isn't fair to excite Archie, Charles," the latter said. "You know that you'll never do it."

"I intend to have a try. Hang it, John, it's the specific we were talking about—devilish difficult, devilish unpleasant, and calculated to make a man long for a dull life. Of course you two fellows will join me."

"What on earth are you talking about?" said the mystified Archie. "Join what?"

"We're proposing to quarter ourselves on you, my lad, and take a leaf out of Jim Tarras's book."

Sir Archie first stared, then he laughed nervously, then he called upon his gods, then he laughed freely and long. "Do you really mean it? What an almighty rag! . . . But hold on a moment. It will be rather awkward for me to take a hand. You see I've just been adopted as prospective candidate for that part of the country."

"So much the better. If you're found out—which you won't be—you'll get the poaching vote solid, and a good deal more. Most men at heart are poachers."

Archie shook a doubting head. "I don't know about that. They're an awfully respectable lot up there, and all those dashed stalkers and keepers and gillies are a sort of trade-union. The scallywags are a hopeless minority. If I get sent to quod——"

"You won't get sent to quod. At the worst it will be a fine, and you can pay that. What's the extreme penalty for this kind of offence, Ned?"

"I don't know," Leithen answered. "I'm not an authority on Scots law. But Archie's perfectly right. We can't go making a public exhibition of ourselves like this. We're too old to be listening to the chimes at midnight."

"Now, look here." Lamancha had shaken off his glumness and was as tense and eager as a school-boy. "Didn't your doctor advise you to steal a horse? Well, this is a long sight easier than horse-stealing. It's admitted that we three want a tonic. On second thoughts Archie had better stand out—he hasn't our ailment, and a healthy man doesn't need medicine. But we three need it, and this idea is an inspiration. Of course we take risks, but they're sound sporting risks. After all, I've a reputation of a kind, and I put as much into the pool as anyone."

His hearers regarded him with stony faces, but this in no way checked his ardour.

"It's a perfectly first-class chance. A lonely house where you can see visitors a mile off, and an

unsociable dog like Archie for a host. We write the letters and receive the answers at a London address. We arrive at Crask by stealth, and stay there unbeknown to the country-side, for Archie can count on his people and my man is a sepulchre. Also we've got Lithgow, who played the same game with Jim Tarras. We have a job which will want every bit of our nerve and ingenuity with a reasonable spice of danger—for, of course, if we fail we should cut queer figures. The thing is simply ordained by Heaven for our benefit. Of course you'll come."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Leithen.

"No more will I," said Palliser-Yeates.

"Then I'll go alone," said Lamanca cheerfully.

"I'm out for a cure, if you're not. You've a month to make up your mind, and meanwhile a share in the syndicate remains open to you."

Sir Archie looked as if he wished he had never mentioned the fatal name of Jim Tarras. "I say, you know, Charles," he began hesitatingly, but was cut short.

"Are you going back on your invitation?" asked Lamanca sternly. "Very well, then, I've accepted it, and what's more I'm going to draft a specimen letter that will go to your Highland grandee, and Claybody, and the American."

He rose with a bound and fetched a pencil and a sheet of notepaper from the nearest writing-table. "Here goes—*Sir, I have the honour to inform you that I propose to kill a stag—or a salmon as the case may be—on your ground between midnight on ——— and midnight ———. We can leave the dates open for the present. The animal, of course, remains*

your property and will be duly delivered to you. It is a condition that it must be removed wholly outside your bounds. In the event of the undersigned failing to achieve his purpose he will pay as forfeit one hundred pounds, and if successful fifty pounds to any charity you may appoint. I have the honour to be, your obedient humble servant."

"What do you say to that?" he asked. "Formal, a little official, but perfectly civil, and the writer proposes to pay his way like a gentleman. Bound to make a good impression."

"You've forgotten the signature," Leithen observed dryly.

"It must be signed with a *nom de guerre*." He thought for a moment. "I've got it. At once business-like and mysterious." At the bottom of the draft he scrawled the name "John Macnab."

XXX: DESPERATE CHARACTERS IN COUNCIL

CRASK—which is properly Craoisg and is so spelled by the Ordnance Survey—when the traveller approaches it from the Larrig Bridge has the air of a West Highland terrier, *couchant* and *regardant*. You are to picture a long tilt of moorland running east and west, not a smooth lawn of heather, but seamed with gullies, and patched with bogs and thickets, and crowned at the summit with a low line of rocks above which may be seen peeping the spikes of the distant Haripol hills. About three-quarters of the way up the slope stands the little house, whitewashed, slated, grey stone framing the narrow windows, with that attractive jumble of masonry which belongs to an

adapted farm. It is approached by a road which scorns detours and runs straight from the glen highway, and it looks south over broken moorland to the shining links of the Larrig, and beyond them to the tributary vale of the Raden and the dark mountains of its source. Such is the view from the house itself, but from the garden behind there is an ampler vista, since to the left a glimpse may be had of the policies of Strathlarrig and even of a corner of that monstrous mansion, and to the right of the tidal waters of the river and the yellow sands on which in the stillest weather the Atlantic frets. Crask is at once a sanctuary and a watch-tower ; it commands a wide country-side and yet preserves its secrecy, for, though officially approached by a road like a ruler, there are a dozen sheltered ways of reaching it by the dips and crannies of the hill-side.

So thought a man who about five o'clock on the afternoon of the 24th of August was inconspicuously drawing towards it by way of a peat road which ran from the east through a wood of birches. Sir Edward Leithen's air was not more cheerful than when we met him a month ago, except that there was now a certain vigour in it which came from ill-temper. He had been for a long walk in the rain, and the scent of wet bracken and birches and bog myrtle, the peaty fragrance of the hills salted with the tang of the sea, had failed to comfort, though, not so long ago, they had had the power to intoxicate. Scrambling in the dell of a burn, he had observed both varieties of the filmy fern and what he knew to be a very rare cerast, and, though an ardent botanist, he had observed them

unmoved. Soon the rain had passed, the west wind blew aside the cloud-wrack, and the Haripol tops had come out black against a turquoise sky, with Sgurr Dearg, awful and remote, towering above all. Though a keen mountaineer, the spectacle had neither exhilarated nor tantalised him. He was in a bad temper, and he knew that at Crask he should find three other men in the same case, for even the debonair Sir Archie was in the dumps with a toothache.

He told himself that he had come on a fool's errand, and the extra absurdity was that he could not quite see how he had been induced to come. He had consistently refused : so had Palliser-Yeates ; Archie as a prospective host had been halting and nervous ; there was even a time when Lamancha, the source of all the mischief, had seemed to waver. Nevertheless, some occult force—false shame probably—had shepherded them all here, unwilling, unconvinced, cold-footed, destined to a preposterous adventure for which not one of them had the slightest zest. . . . Yet they had taken immense pains to arrange the thing, just as if they were all exulting in the prospect. His own clerk was to attend to the forwarding of their letters, including any which might be addressed to " John Macnab." The newspapers had contained paragraphs announcing that the Countess of Lamancha had gone to Aix for a month, where she would presently be joined by her husband, who intended to spend a week taking the baths before proceeding to his grouse-moor of Leriot on the Borders. *The Times*, three days ago, had recorded Sir Edward Leithen and Mr. John Palliser-Yeates as among those who

had left Euston for Edinburgh, and more than one social paragrapher had mentioned that the ex-Attorney-General would be spending his holiday fishing on the Tay, while the eminent banker was to be the guest of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at an informal vacation conference on the nation's precarious finances. Lamanca had been fetched under cover of night by Archie from a station so remote that no one but a lunatic would think of using it. Palliser-Yeates had tramped for two days across the hills from the south, and Leithen himself, having been instructed to bring a Ford car, had had a miserable drive of a hundred and fifty miles in the rain, during which he had repeatedly lost his way. He had carried out his injunctions as to secrecy by arriving at two in the morning by means of this very peat road. The troops had achieved their silent concentration, and the silly business must now begin. Leithen groaned and anathematised the memory of Jim Tarras.

As he approached the house he saw, to his amazement, a large closed car making its way down the slope. Putting his glass on it, he watched it reach the glen road and then turn east, passing the gates of Strathlarrig, till he lost it behind a shoulder of hills. Hurrying across the stable-yard he entered the house by the back-door, disturbing Lithgow the keeper in the midst of a whispered confabulation with Lamanca's man, whose name was Shapp. Passing through the gun-room he found, in the big smoking-room which looked over the valley, Lamanca and Palliser-Yeates with the crouch of conspirators flattening their noses on the window-panes.

The sight of him diverted the attention of the two from the landscape.

"This is an infernal plant," Palliser-Yeates exclaimed. "Archie swore to us that no one ever came here, and the second day a confounded great car arrives. Charles and I had just time to nip in here and lock the door, while Archie parleyed with them. He's been uncommon quick about it. The brutes didn't stay for more than five minutes."

"Who were they?" Leithen asked.

"Only got a side glance at them. They seemed to be a stout woman and a girl—oh, and a yelping little dog. I expect Archie kicked him, for he was giving tongue from the drawing-room."

The door opened to admit their host, who bore in one hand a large whisky-and-soda. He dropped wearily into a chair, where he sipped the beverage. An observer might have noted that what could be seen of his wholesome face was much inflamed, and that a bandage round chin and cheeks which ended in a top-knot above his scalp gave him the appearance of Ricquet with the Tuft in the fairy-tale.

"That's all right," he said, in the tone of a man who has done a good piece of work. "I've choked off visitors at Crask for a bit, for the old lady will put it all round the country-side."

"Put what?" said Leithen, and "Who is the old lady?" asked Lamanha, and "Did you kick the dog?" demanded Palliser-Yeates.

Archie looked drearily at his friends. "It was Lady Claybody and a daughter—I think the second one—and their horrid little dog. They won't come back in a hurry—nobody will come back—I'm marked down as a pariah. Hang it, I may as well

chuck my candidature. I've scuppered my prospects for the sake of you three asses."

"What has the blessed martyr been and done?" asked Palliser-Yeats

"I've put a barrage round this place, that's all. I was very civil to the Claybodys, though I felt a pretty fair guy with my head in a sling. I bustled about, talking nonsense and offering tea, and then, as luck would have it, I trod on the hound. That's the worst of my game leg. The brute nearly had me over, and it started howling—you must have heard it. That dog's a bit weak in the head, for it can't help barking just out of pure cussedness—Lady Claybody says it's high-strung because of its fine breeding. It got something to bark for this time, and the old woman had it in her arms fondling it and looking very old-fashioned at me. It seems the beast's name is Roguie and she called it her darling Wee Roguie, for she's picking up a bit of Scots since she came to live in these parts. . . . Lucky Mackenzie wasn't at home. He'd have eaten it. . . . Well, after that things settled down, and I was just going to order tea, when it occurred to the daughter to ask what was wrong with my face. Then I had an inspiration."

Archie paused and smiled sourly.

"I said I didn't know, but I feared I might be sickening for smallpox. I hinted that my face was a horrid sight under the bandage."

"Good for you, Archie," said Lamancha. "What happened then?"

"They bolted—fairly ran for it. They did record time into their car—scarcely stopped to say good-bye. I suppose you realise what I've done,

you fellows. The natives here are scared to death of infectious diseases, and if we hadn't our own people we wouldn't have a servant left in the house. The story will be all over the country-side in two days, and my only fear is that it may bring some medical officer of health nosing round. . . . Anyhow, it will choke off visitors."

"Archie, you're a brick," was Lamancha's tribute.

"I'm very much afraid I'm a fool, but thank Heaven I'm not the only one. Sime," he shouted in a voice of thunder, "what's happened to tea?"

The shout brought the one-armed butler and Shapp with the apparatus of the meal, and an immense heap of letters all addressed to Sir Archibald Roylance.

"Hullo! the mail has arrived," cried the master of the house. "Now let's see what's the news of John Macnab?"

He hunted furiously among the correspondence, tearing open envelopes and distributing letters to the others with the rapidity of a conjurer. One little sealed packet he reserved to the last, and drew from it three missives bearing the same superscription.

These he opened, glanced at, and handed to Lamancha. "Read 'em out, Charles," he said. "It's the answers at last."

Lamancha read slowly the first document, of which this is the text:

"Glenraden Castle,

"Strathlarrig,

Aug. —, 19—.

"Sir,

"I have received your insolent letter. I do not know what kind of rascal you may be, except that

you have the morals of a bandit and the assurance of a halfpenny journalist. But since you seem in your perverted way to be a sportsman, I am not the man to refuse your challenge. My reply is, sir, damn your eyes and have a try. I defy you to kill a stag in my forest between midnight on the 28th of August and midnight of the 30th. I will give instructions to my men to guard my marches, and if you should be roughly handled by them you have only to blame yourself.

"Yours faithfully,

"John Macnab, Esq."

"ALASTAIR RADEN."

"That's a good fellow," said Archie with conviction. "Just the sort of letter I'd write myself. He takes things in the proper spirit. But it's a blue look-out for your chances, my lads. What old Raden doesn't know about deer isn't knowledge."

Lamancha read the second reply :

"Strathlarrig House,

"Strathlarrig,

"Aug. —, 19—."

"My dear Sir,

"Your letter was somewhat of a surprise, but as I am not yet familiar with the customs of this country, I forbear to enlarge on this point, and since you have marked it 'Confidential' I am unable to take advice. You state that you intend to kill a salmon in the Strathlarrig water between midnight on September 1 and midnight on September 3, this salmon, if killed, to remain my property. I have consulted such books as might give me guidance, and I am bound to state that in my view the laws of Scotland are hostile to

your suggested proposition. Nevertheless, I do not take my stand on the law, for I presume that your proposition is conceived in a sporting spirit, and that you dare me to stop you. Well, sir, I will see you on that hand. The fishing is not that good at present that I am inclined to quarrel about one salmon. I give you leave to use every method that may occur to you to capture that fish, and I promise to use every method that may occur to me to prevent you. In your letter you undertake to use only 'legitimate means.' I would have pleasure in meeting you in the same spirit, but I reckon that all means are counted legitimate in the capture of poachers.

"Cordially,

"JUNIUS THEODORE BANDICOTT.

"Mr. J. Macnab."

"That's the young 'un," Archie observed. "The old man was christened 'Acheson,' and don't take any interest in fishing. He spends his time in looking for Norse remains."

"He seems a decent sort of fellow," said Palliser-Yeates, "but I don't quite like the last sentence. He'll probably try shooting, same as his countrymen once did on the Beaulieu. Whoever gets this job will have some excitement for his money."

Lamancha read out the last letter :

"227 North Melville Street,

"Edinburgh,

"Aug. —, 19—.

"Sir,

"Re Haripol Forest

"Our client, the Right Honourable Lord Claybody, has read to us on the telephone your letter of Aug. —

and has desired us to reply to it. We are instructed to say that our client is at a loss to understand how to take your communication, whether as a piece of impertinence or as a serious threat. If it is the latter, and you persist in your intention, we are instructed to apply to the Court for a summary interdict to prevent your entering upon his lands. We would also point out that, under the Criminal Law of Scotland, any person whatsoever who commits a trespass in the daytime by entering upon any land without leave of the proprietor, in pursuit of, *inter alia*, deer, is liable to a fine of £2, while, if such person have his face blackened, or if five or more persons acting in concert commit the trespass, the penalty is £5 (2 & 3 William IV, c. 68).

"We are, sir,

"Your obedient servants,

"PROSER, MCKELPIE, AND MACLYMONT.

"John Macnab, Esq."

Lamancha laughed. "Is that good law, Ned?"

Leithen read the letter again. "I suppose so. Deer being *feræ naturæ*, there is no private property in them or common law crime in killing them, and the only remedy is to prevent trespass in pursuit of them or to punish the trespasser."

"It seems to me that you get off pretty lightly," said Archie. "Two quid is not much in the way of a fine, for I don't suppose you want to black your faces or march five deep into Haripol. . . . But what a rotten sportsman old Claybody is!"

Palliser-Yeates heaved a sigh of apparent relief. "I am bound to say the replies are better than I

expected. It will be a devil of a business, though, to circumvent that old Highland chief, and that young American sounds formidable. Only, if we're caught out there, we're dealing with sportsmen and can appeal to their higher nature, you know. Claybody is probably the easiest proposition so far as getting a stag is concerned, but if we're nobbled by him we needn't look for mercy. Still, it's only a couple of pounds."

"You're an ass, John," said Leithen. "It's only a couple of pounds for John Macnab. But if these infernal Edinburgh lawyers get on to the job, it will be a case of producing the person of John Macnab, and then we're all in the cart. Don't you realise that in this fool's game we simply cannot afford to lose—none of us?"

"That," said Lamancha, "is beyond doubt the truth, and it's just there that the fun comes in."

The reception of the three letters had brightened the atmosphere. Each man had now something to think about, and, till it was time to dress for dinner, each was busy with sheets of the Ordnance maps. The rain had begun again, the curtains were drawn, and round a good fire of peat they read and smoked and dozed. Then they had hot baths, and it was a comparatively cheerful and very hungry party that assembled in the dining-room. Archie proposed champagne, but the offer was unani-mously declined. "We ought to be in training," Lamancha warned him. "Keep the Widow for the occasions when we need comforting. They'll come all right."

Palliser-Yeates was enthusiastic about the food. "I must say, you do us very well," he told his host.

"These haddocks are the best things I've ever eaten. How do you manage to get fresh sea-fish here?"

Archie appealed to Sime. "They come from Inverlarrig, Sir Erchibald," said the butler. "There's a wee laddie comes up here sellin' haddies verra near every day."

"Bless my soul, Sime. I thought no one came up here. You know my orders."

"This is just a tinkler laddie, Sir Erchibald. He sleeps in a cairt down about Larrigmore. He just comes wi' his powny and awa' back, and doesna bide twae minutes. Mistress Lithgow was anxious for haddies, for she said gentlemen got awfu' tired of saumon and trout."

"All right, Sime. I'll speak to Mrs. Lithgow. She'd better tell him we don't want any more. By the way, we ought to see Lithgow after dinner. Tell him to come to the smoking-room."

When Sime had put the port on the table and withdrawn, Leithen lifted up his voice.

"Look here, before we get too deep into this thing, let's make sure that we know where we are. We've all three turned up here—why, I don't know. But there's still time to go back. We realise now what we're in for. Are you clear in your minds that you want to go on?"

"I am," said Lamancha doggedly. "I'm out for a cure. Hang it, I feel a better man already."

"I suppose your profession makes you take risks," said Leithen dryly. "Mine doesn't. What about you, John?"

Palliser-Yeates shifted uneasily in his chair. "I don't want to go on. I feel no kind of keenness,

and my feet are rather cold. And yet—you know—I should feel rather ashamed to turn back.”

Archie uplifted his turbaned head. “That’s how I feel, though I’m not on myself in this piece. We’ve given hostages, and the credit of John Macnab is at stake. We’ve dared old Raden and young Bandicott, and we can’t decently cry off. Besides, I’m advertised as a smallpox patient, and it would be a pity to make a goat of myself for nothing. Mind you, I stand to lose as much as anybody, if we bungle things.”

Leithen had the air of bowing to the inevitable. “Very well, that’s settled. But I wish to Heaven I saw myself safely out of it. My only inducement to go on is to score off that bounder Claybody. He and his attorney’s letter put my hackles up.”

In the smoking-room Lamancha busied himself with preparing three slips of paper and writing on them three names.

“We must hold a council of war,” he said. “First of all, we have taken measures to keep our presence here secret. My man Shapp is all right. What about your people, Archie.”

“Sime and Carfrae have been warned, and you may count on them. They’re the class of lads that ask no questions. So are the Lithgows. We’ve no neighbours, and they’re anyway not the gossiping kind, and I’ve put them on their Bible oath. I fancy they think the reason is politics. They’re a trifle scared of you, Charles, and your reputation, for they’re not accustomed to hiding Cabinet Ministers in the scullery. Lithgow’s a fine crusted old Tory.”

“Good. Well, we’d better draw for beats, and get Lithgow in.”

The figure that presently appeared before them was a small man, about fifty years of age, with a great breadth of shoulder and a massive face decorated with a wispish tawny beard. His mouth had the gravity and primness of an elder of the Kirk, but his shrewd blue eyes were not grave. The son of a Tweeddale shepherd who had emigrated years before to a cheviot farm in Sutherland, he was in every line and feature the Lowlander, and his speech had still the broad intonation of the Borders. But all his life had been spent in the Highlands on this and that deer forest, and as a young stalker he had been picked out by Jim Tarras for his superior hill-craft. To Archie his chief recommendation was that he was a passionate naturalist, who was as eager to stalk a rare bird with a field-glass as to lead a rifle up to deer. Other traits will appear in the course of this narrative ; but it may be noted here that he was a voracious reader, and in the long winter nights had amassed a store of varied knowledge, which was patently improving his master's mind. Archie was accustomed to quote him for most of his views on matters other than ornithology and war.

"Do you mind going over to that corner and shuffling these slips ? Now, John, you draw first."

Mr. Palliser-Yeates extracted a slip from Lithgow's massive hand.

"Glenraden," he cried. "Whew ! I'm for it this time."

Leithen drew next. His slip read Strathlarrig.

"Thank God, I've got old Claybody," said Lamancha. "Unless you want him very badly, Ned ?"

Leithen shook his head. "I'm content. It would be a bad start to change the draw."

"Sit down, Wattie," said Archie. "Here's a dram for you. We've summoned you to a consultation. I daresay you've been wondering what all this fuss about secrecy has meant. I'm going to tell you. You were with Mr. Tarras, and you've often told me about his poaching. Well, these three gentlemen want to have a try at the same game. They're tired of ordinary sport, and want something more exciting. It wouldn't do, of course, for them to appear under their real names, so they've invented a *nom de guerre*—that's a bogus name, you know. They call themselves collectively, as you might say, John Macnab. John Macnab writes from London to three proprietors, same as Mr. Tarras used to do, and proposes to take a deer or a salmon on their property within certain dates. There's a copy of the letter, and here are the replies that arrived to-night. Just you read 'em."

Lithgow, without moving a muscle of his face, took the documents. He nodded approvingly over the original letter. He smiled broadly at Colonel Raden's epistle, puzzled a little at Mr. Bandicott's, and wrinkled his brows over that of the Edinburgh solicitors. Then he stared into the fire, and emitted short grunts which might have equally well been chuckles or groans.

"Well, what do you think of the chances?" asked Archie at length.

"Would the gentlemen be good shots?" asked Lithgow.

"Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who has drawn Glenraden,

is a very good shot," Archie replied, "and he has stalked on nearly every forest in Scotland. Lord Lamancha—Charles, you're pretty good, aren't you?"

"Fair," was the answer. "Good on my day."

"And Sir Edward Leithen is a considerable artist on the river. Now, Wattie, you understand that they want to win—want to get the stags and the salmon—but it's absolute sheer naked necessity that, whether they fail or succeed, they mustn't be caught. John Macnab must remain John Macnab, an unknown blighter from London. You know who Lord Lamancha is, but perhaps you don't know that Sir Edward Leithen is a great lawyer, and Mr. Palliser-Yeates is one of the biggest bankers in the country."

"I ken all about the gentlemen," said Lithgow gravely. "I was readin' Mr. Yeates's letter in *The Times* about the debt we was owin' America, and I mind fine Sir Edward's speeches in Parliament about the Irish Constitution. I didna altogether agree with him."

"Good for you, Wattie. You see, then, how desperately important it is that the thing shouldn't get out. Mr. Tarras didn't much care if he was caught, but if John Macnab is uncovered there will be a high and holy row. Now you grasp the problem, and you've got to pull up your socks and think it out. I don't want your views to-night, but I should like to have your notion of the chances in a general way. What's the betting? Twenty to one against?"

"Mair like a thousand," said Lithgow grimly. "It will be verra, verra deeficult. It will want a

deal o' thinkin'." Then he added, "Mr. Tarras was an awfu' grand shot. He would kill a runnin' beast at fower hundred yards—aye, he could make certain of it."

"Good Lord, I'm not in that class," Palliser-Yeates exclaimed.

"Aye, and he was more than a grand shot. He could creep up to a sleepin' beast in the dark and pit a knife in its throat. The sauvages in Africa had learned him that. There was plenty o' times when him and me were out that it wasna possible to use the rifle."

"We can't compete there," said Lamancha dolefully.

"But I wad not say it was impossible," Lithgow added more briskly. "It will want a deal o' thinkin'. It might be done on Haripol—I wadna say but it might be done, but yon auld man at Glenraden will be ill to get the better of. And the Strathlarrig water is an easy water to watch. Ye'll be for only takin' shootable beasts, like Mr. Tarras, and ye'll not be wantin' to cleek a fish? It might be not so hard to get a wee staggie, or to sniggle a salmon in one of the deep pots."

"No, we must play the game by the rules. We're not poachers."

"Then it will be verra, verra deeficult."

"You understand," put in Lamancha, "that, though we count on your help, you yourself mustn't be suspected. It's as important for you as for us to avoid suspicion, for if they got you it would implicate your master, and that mustn't happen on any account."

"I ken that. It will be verra, verra deeficult. I

said the odds were a thousand to one, but I think ten thousand wad be liker the thing."

"Well, go and sleep on it, and we'll see you in the morning. And tell your wife I don't want any boys coming up to the house with fish. She must send elsewhere and buy 'em. Good-night, Wattie."

When Lithgow had withdrawn the four men sat silent and meditative in their chairs. One would rise now and then and knock out his pipe, but scarcely a word was spoken. It is to be presumed that the thoughts of each were on the task in hand, but Leithen's must have wandered. "By the way, Archie," he said, "I saw a very pretty girl on the road this afternoon, riding a yellow pony. Who could she be?"

"Lord knows!" said Archie. "Probably one of the Raden girls. I haven't seen 'em yet."

When the clock struck eleven Sir Archie arose and ordered his guests to bed.

"I think my toothache is gone," he said, switching off his turban and revealing a ruffled head and scarlet cheek. Then he muttered: "A thousand to one! Ten thousand to one! It can't be done, you know. We've got to find some way of shortening the odds!"

XXXI: RECONNAISSANCE

ROSY-FINGERED DAWN, when, attended by mild airs and a sky of Italian blue, she looked in at Crask next morning, found two members of the household already astir. Mr. Palliser-Yeates, coerced by Wattie Lithgow, was starting with bitter self-condemnation to prospect what his guide

called "the yont side o' Glenraden." A quarter of an hour later Lamancha, armed with a map and a telescope, departed alone for the crest of hill behind which lay the Haripol forest. After that peace fell on the place, and it was not till the hour of ten that Sir Edward Leithen descended for breakfast.

The glory of the morning had against his convictions made him cheerful. The place smelt so good within and without, Mrs. Lithgow's scones were so succulent, the bacon so crisp, and Archie, healed of the toothache, was so preposterous and mirthful a figure that Leithen found a faint zest again in the contemplation of the future. When Archie advised him to get busy about the Larrig he did not complain, but accompanied his host to the gun-room, where he studied attentively on a large-scale map the three miles of the stream in the tenancy of Mr. Bandicott.

It seemed to him that he had better equip himself for the part by some simple disguise, so, declining Archie's suggestion of a kilt, he returned to his bedroom to refit. Obviously the best line was the tourist, so he donned a stiff white shirt and a stiff dress collar with a tartan bow-tie contributed from Sime's wardrobe. Light brown boots in which he had travelled from London took the place of his nailed shoes, and his thick knickerbocker stockings bulged out above them. Sime's watch-chain, from which depended a football club medal, a vulgar green Homburg hat of Archie's, and a camera slung on his shoulders completed the equipment. His host surveyed him with approval.

"The Blackpool season is beginning," he observed. "You're the born tripper, my lad. Don't

forget the picture post-cards." A bicycle was found, and the late Attorney-General zigzagged warily down the steep road to the Larrig bridge.

He entered the highway without seeing a human soul, and according to plan turned down the glen towards Inverlarrig. There at the tiny post office he bought the regulation picture post-cards, and conversed in what he imagined to be the speech of Cockaigne with the aged post-mistress. He was eloquent on the beauties of the weather and the landscape and not reticent as to his personal affairs. He was, he said, a seeker for beauty-spots, and had heard that the best were to be found in the demesne of Strathlarrig. "It's private grund," he was told, "but there's Americans bidin' there and they're kind folk and awfu' free with their siller. If ye ask at the lodge, they'll maybe let ye in to potograph." The sight of an array of ginger-beer bottles inspired him to further camouflage, so he purchased two which he stuck in his side-pockets.

East of the Bridge of Larrig he came to the chasm in the river, above which he knew began the Strathlarrig water. The first part was a canal-like stretch among bogs, which promised ill for fishing, but beyond a spit of rock the Larrig curled in towards the road edge, and ran in noble pools and swift streams under the shadow of great pines. This Leithen knew, from the map, was the Wood of Larrigmore, a remnant of the ancient Caledonian Forest. By the water's edge the covert was dark, but towards the roadside the trees thinned out, and the ground was delicately carpeted with heather and thymy turf. There grazed an aged

white pony, and a few yards off, on the shaft of a dilapidated fish-cart, sat a small boy.

Leithen, leaning his bicycle against a tree, prospected the murky pools with the air rather of an angler than a photographer, and in the process found his stiff shirt and collar a vexation. Also the ginger-beer bottles bobbed unpleasantly at his side. So, catching sight of the boy, he beckoned him near. "Do you like ginger-beer?" he asked, and in reply to a vigorous nod bestowed the pair on him. The child returned like a dog to the shelter of the cart, whence might have been presently heard the sound of gluttonous enjoyment. Leithen, having satisfied himself that no mortal could take a fish in that thicket, continued up-stream till he struck the wall of the Strathlarrig domain and a vast castellated lodge.

The lodge-keeper made no objection when he sought admittance, and he turned from the gravel drive towards the river, which now flowed through a rough natural park. For a fisherman it was the water of his dreams. The pools were long and shelving, with a strong stream at the head and, below, precisely the right kind of boulders and outjutting banks to shelter fish. There were three of these pools—the "Duke's," the "Black Scour," and "Davie's Pot," were the names Archie had told him—and beyond, almost under the windows of the house, "Lady Maisie's," conspicuous for its dwarf birches and the considerable waterfall above it. Here he made believe to take a photograph, though he had no idea how a camera worked, and reflected dismally upon the magnitude of his task. The whole place was as bright and open as the

Horse Guards Parade. The house commanded all four pools, which he knew to be the best, and even at midnight, with the owner unsuspecting, poaching would be nearly impossible. What would it be when the owner was warned, and legitimate methods of fishing were part of the contract?

After a glance at the house, which seemed to be deep in noontide slumber, he made his inconspicuous way past the end of a formal garden to a reach where the Larrig flowed wide and shallow over pebbles. Then came a belt of firs, and then a long tract of broken water which was obviously not a place to hold salmon. He realised, from his memory of the map, that he must be near the end of the Strathlarrig beat, for the topmost mile was a series of unfishable linns. But presently he came to a noble pool. It lay in a meadow where the hay had just been cut, and was liker a bit of Tweed or Eden than a Highland stream. Its shores were low and on the near side edged with fine gravel; the far bank was a green rise unspoiled by scrub; the current entered it with a proud swirl, washed the high bank, and spread itself out in a beautifully broken tail, so that every yard of it spelled fish. Leithen stared at it with appreciative eyes. The back of a moving monster showed in mid-stream, and automatically he raised his arm in an imaginary cast.

The next second he observed a man walking across the meadow towards him, and remembered his character. Directing his camera hastily at the butt-end of a black-faced sheep on the opposite shore, he appeared to be taking a careful photograph, after which he restored the apparatus to its

case and turned to reconnoitre the stranger. This proved to be a middle-aged man in ancient tweed knickerbockers of an outrageous pattern known locally as the "Strathlarrig tartan." He was obviously a river-keeper, and was advancing with a resolute and minatory air.

Leithen took off his hat with a flourish.

"Have I the honour, sir, to address the owner of this lovely spot?" he asked in what he hoped was the true accent of a tripper.

The keeper stopped short and regarded him sternly.

"What are ye daein' here?" he demanded.

"Picking up a few pictures, sir. I inquired at your lodge, and was told that I might presume upon your indulgence. Pardon me, if I 'ave presumed too far. If I 'ad known that the proprietor was at 'and I would have sought 'im out and addressed my 'umble request to 'imself."

The keeper was thawing under this humility.

"Ye're makin' a mistake. I'm no the laird. The laird's awa' about India. But Mr. Bandicott—that's him that's the tenant—has given strict orders that naeboddy's to gang near the watter. I wonder Mactavish at the lodge hadna mair sense."

"I fear the blame is mine," said the agreeable tourist. "I only asked leave to enter the grounds, but the beauty of the scenery attracted me to the river. Never 'ave I seen a more exquisite spot." He waved his arm towards the pool.

"It's no that bad. But ye maun awa' out o' this. Ye'd better gang by the back road, for fear they see ye frae the hoose"

Leithen followed him obediently, after presenting

him with a cigarette, which he managed to extract without taking his case from his pocket. It should have been a fag, he reflected, and not one of Archie's special Egyptians. As they walked he conversed volubly.

"What's the name of the river?" he asked. "Is it the Strathlarrig?"

"No. It's the Larrig, and that bit you like sae weel is the Minister's Pool. There's no a pool like it in Scotland."

"I believe you. There is not," was the enthusiastic reply.

"I mean for fish. Ye'll no ken muckle about fishin'."

"I've done a bit of anglin' at 'ome. What do you catch here? Jack and perch?"

"Jack and perch!" cried the keeper scornfully. "Saumon, man. Saumon up to thirty pounds' wecht."

"Oh, of course, salmon. That must be a glorious sport. But a friend of mine, who has seen it done, told me it wasn't 'ard. He said that even I could catch a salmon."

"Mair like a saumon wad catch you. Now, you haud down the back road, and ye'll come out aside the lodge gate. And dinna you come here again. The orders is strict, and if auld Angus was to get a grip o' ye, I wadna say what wad happen. Guid day to ye, and dinna stop till ye're out o' the gates."

Leithen did as he was bid, circumnavigated the house, struck a farm track, and in time reached the high road. It was a very doleful tourist who trod the wayside heather past the Wood of Larrigmore. Never had he seen a finer stretch of water or one so

impreguably defended. No bluff or ingenuity would avail an illicit angler on that open greensward, with every keeper mobilised and on guard. He thought less now of the idiocy of the whole proceeding than of the folly of plunging in the dark upon just that piece of river. There were many streams where Jim Tarras's feat might be achieved, but he had chosen the one stretch in all Scotland where it was starkly impossible.

The recipient of the ginger-beer was still sitting by the shafts of his cart. He seemed to be lunching, for he was carving attentively a hunk of cheese and a loaf-end with a gully-knife. As he looked up from his task Leithen saw a child of perhaps twelve summers, with a singularly alert and impudent eye, a much-freckled face, and a thatch of tow-coloured hair bleached almost white by the sun. His feet were bare, his trousers were those of a grown man, tucked up at the knees and hitched up almost under his armpits, and for a shirt he appeared to have a much-torn jersey. Weather had tanned his whole appearance into the blend of greys and browns which one sees on a hill-side boulder. The boy nodded gravely to Leithen, and continued to munch.

Below the wood lay the half-mile where the Larrig wound sluggishly through a bog before precipitating itself into the chasm above the Bridge of Larrig. Leithen left his bicycle by the roadside and crossed the waste of hags and tussocks to the water's edge. It looked a thankless place for the angler. The clear streams of the Larrig seemed to have taken on the colour of their banks, and to drowse dark and deep and

sullen in one gigantic peat-hole. In spite of the rain of yesterday there was little current. The place looked oily, stagnant, and unfishable—a tract through which salmon after mounting the fall would hurry to the bright pools above.

Leithen sat down in a clump of heather and lit his pipe. Something might be done with a worm after a spate, he considered, but any other lure was out of the question. The place had its merits for every purpose but taking salmon. It was a part of the Strathlarrig water outside the park pale, and it was so hopeless that it was not likely to be carefully patrolled. The high road, it was true, ran near, but it was little frequented. If only . . . He suddenly sat up, and gazed intently at a ripple on the dead surface. Surely that was a fish on the move. . . . He kept his eyes on the river, until he saw something else which made him rub them, and fall into deep reflection. . . .

He was roused by a voice at his shoulder.

"What for will they no let me come up to Crask ony mair?" the voice demanded in a sort of tinkler's whine. Leithen turned and found the boy of the ginger-beer.

"Hullo! You oughtn't to do that, my son. You'll give people heart disease. What was it you asked?"

"What . . . for . . . will . . . they . . . no . . . let . . . me come . . . up to Crask . . . ony mair?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What's Crask?"

"Ye ken it fine. It's the big hoose up the hill. I seen you come doon frae it yoursel' this mornin'."

Leithen was tempted to deny this allegation and

assert his title of tourist, but something in the extreme intelligence of the boy's face suggested that such a course might be dangerous. Instead he said, "Tell me your name, and what's your business at Crask?"

"My name's Benjamin Bogle, but I get Fish Benjie frae most folk. I've sell't haddies and flukes to Crask these twa months. But this mornin' I was tell't no to come back, and when I speired what way, the auld wife shut the door on me."

A recollection of Sir Archie's order the night before returned to Leithen's mind, and with it a great sense of insecurity. The argus-eyed child, hot with a grievance, had seen him descend from Crask, and was therefore in a position to give away the whole show. What chance was there for secrecy with this malevolent scout hanging around?

"Where do you live, Benjie?"

"I bide in my cairt. My father's in jyle, and my mither's lyin' badly in Muirtown. I sell fish to a' the gentry."

"And you want to know why you can't sell them at Crask?"

"Aye, I wad like to ken that. The auld wife used to be a kind body and gie me jeely pieces. What's turned her into a draygon?"

Leithen was accustomed, in the duties of his profession, to quick decisions on tactics, and now he took one which was destined to be momentous.

"Benjie," he said solemnly, "there's a lot of things in the world that I don't understand, and it stands to reason that there must be more that you don't. I'm in a position in which I badly want somebody to help me. I like the look of you. You

look a trusty fellow and a keen one. Is all your time taken up selling haddies? "

" 'Deed no. Just twa hours in the mornin', and twa hours at nicht when I gang down to the cobles at Inverlarrig. I've a heap o' time on my hands."

" Good. I think I can promise that you may resume your trade at Crask. But first I want you to do a job for me. There's a bicycle lying by the roadside. Bring it up to Crask this evening between six and seven. Have you a watch? "

" No, but I can tell the time braw and fine."

" Go to the stables and wait for me there. I want to have a talk with you." Leithen produced half a crown, on which the grubby paw of Fish Benjie instantly closed.

" And look here, Benjie. You haven't seen me here, or anybody like me. Above all, you didn't see me come down from Crask this morning. If anybody asks you questions, you only saw a man on a bicycle on the road to Inverlarrig."

The boy nodded, and his solemn face flickered for a second with a subtle smile.

" Well, that's a bargain." Leithen got up from his couch and turned down the river, making for the Bridge of Larrig, where the highway crossed. He looked back once, and saw Fish Benjie wheeling his bicycle into the undergrowth of the wood. He was in two minds as to whether he had done wisely in placing himself in the hands of a small ragamuffin, who for all he knew might be hand-in-glove with the Strathlarrig keepers. But the recollection of Benjie's face reassured him. He did not look like a boy who would be the pet of any constituted authority; he had the air rather of the nomad

against whom the orderly world waged war. There had been an impish honesty in his face, and Leithen, who had a weakness for disreputable urchins, felt that he had taken the right course. Besides, the young sleuth-hound had got on his trail, and there had been nothing for it but to make him an ally.

He crossed the bridge, avoided the Crask road, and struck up-hill by a track which followed the ravine of a burn. As he walked his mind went back to a stretch on a Canadian river, a stretch of still unruffled water warmed all day by a July sun. It had been as full as it could hold of salmon, but no artifice of his could stir them. There in the late afternoon had come an aged man from Boston, who fished with a light trout rod and cast a deft line, and placed a curious little dry fly several feet above a fish's snout. Then, by certain strange manœuvres, he had drawn the fly under water. Leithen had looked on and marvelled, while before sunset that ancient man hooked and landed seven good fish. . . . Somehow that bit of shining sun-flecked Canadian river reminded him of the unpromising stretch of the Larrig he had just been reconnoitring.

At a turn of the road he came upon his host, tramping homeward in the company of a most unprepossessing hound. I pause for an instant to introduce Mackenzie. He was a mongrel collie of the old Highland stock, known as "beardies," and his touzled head, not unlike an extra-shaggy Dandie Dinmont's, was set upon a body of immense length, girth and muscle. His manners were atrocious to all except his master, and local

report accused him of every canine vice except worrying sheep. He had been christened "The Bluidy Mackenzie" after a noted persecutor of the godly, by someone whose knowledge of history was greater than Sir Archie's, for the latter never understood the allusion. The name, however, remained his official one; commonly he was addressed as Mackenzie, but in moments of expansion he was referred to by his master as Old Bloody.

The said master seemed to be in a strange mood. He was dripping wet, having apparently fallen into the river, but his spirits soared, and he kept on smiling in a light-headed way. He scarcely listened to Leithen, when he told him of his compact with Fish Benjie. "I daresay it will be all right," he observed idiotically. "Is your idea to pass off one of his haddies as a young salmon on the guileless Bandicott?" For an explanation of Sir Archie's conduct the chronicler must retrace his steps.

After Leithen's departure it had seemed good to him to take the air, so, summoning Mackenzie from a dark lair in the yard, he made his way to the river—the beat below the bridge and beyond the high road, which was on Crask ground. There it was a broad brawling water, boulder-strewn and shallow, which an active man could cross dry-shod by natural stepping-stones. Sir Archie sat for a time on the near shore, listening to the sandpipers—birds which were his special favourites—and watching the whinchats on the hill-side and the flashing white breasts of the water-ousels. Mackenzie lay beside him, an uneasy sphinx, tormented by a distant subtle odour of badger.

Presently Sir Archie arose and stepped out on a

half-submerged boulder. He was getting very proud of the way he had learned to manage his game leg, and it occurred to him that here was a chance of testing his balance. If he could hop across on the stones to the other side he might regard himself as an able-bodied man. Balancing himself with his stick as a rope-dancer uses his pole, he in due course reached the middle of the current. After that it was more difficult, for the stones were smaller, and the stream more rapid, but with an occasional splash and flounder he landed safely, to be saluted with a shower of spray from Mackenzie, who had taken the deep-water route.

"Not so bad that, for a crock," he told himself, as he lay full length in the sun watching the faint line of the Haripol hills overtopping the ridge of Crask.

Half an hour was spent in idleness till the dawning of hunger warned him to return. The crossing as seen from this side looked more formidable, for the first stones could only be reached by jumping a fairly broad stretch of current. Yet the jump was achieved, and with renewed confidence Sir Archie essayed the more solid boulders. All would have gone well had not he taken his eyes from the stones and observed on the bank beyond a girl's figure. She had been walking by the stream and had stopped to stare at the portent of his performance. Now Sir Archie was aware that his style of jumping was not graceful, and he was discomposed by this sudden gallery. Nevertheless, the thing was so easy that he could scarcely have failed had it not been for the faithful Mackenzie. That animal had resolved to follow his master's footsteps, and was

jumping steadily behind him. But three boulders from the shore they jumped simultaneously, and there was not standing-room for both. Sir Archie, already nervous, slipped, recovered himself, slipped again, and then, accompanied by Mackenzie, subsided noisily into three feet of water.

He waded ashore to find himself faced by a girl in whose face concern struggled with amusement. He lifted a dripping hat and grinned.

"Silly exhibition, wasn't it? All the fault of Mackenzie! Idiotic brute of a dog, not to remember my game leg!"

"You're horribly wet," the girl said, "but it was sporting of you to try that crossing. What about dry clothes?"

"Oh, no trouble about that. I've only to get up to Crask."

"You're Sir Archibald Roylance, aren't you? I'm Janet Raden. I've been with papa to call on you, but you're never at home."

Sir Archie, having now got the water out of his eyes and hair, was able to regard his interlocutor. He saw a slight girl with what seemed to him astonishingly bright hair and very blue and candid eyes. She appeared to be anxious about his dry clothes, for she led the way up the bank at a great pace, while he limped behind her. Suddenly she noticed the limp.

"Oh, please forgive me, I forgot about your leg. You had another smash, hadn't you, besides the one in the war—steeplechasing, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but it didn't signify. I'm all right again and get about anywhere, but I'm a bit slow on the wing, you know."

Handwritten signature

"You're keen about horses?"

"Love 'em."

"So do I. Agatha—that's my sister—doesn't care a bit about them. She would like to live all the year at Glenraden, but—I'm ashamed to say it—I would rather have a foggy November in Warwickshire than August in Scotland. I simply dream of hunting."

The ardent eyes and the young grace of the girl seemed marvellous things to Sir Archie. "I expect you go uncommon well," he murmured.

"No, only moderate. I only get scratch mounts. You see I stay with my Aunt Barbara, and she's too old to hunt, and has nothing in her stables but camels. But this year . . ." She broke off as she caught sight of the pools forming round Sir Archie's boots. "I mustn't keep you here talking. You be off home at once."

"Don't worry about me. I'm wet for days on end when I'm watching birds in the spring. You were saying about this year?"

Her answer was a surprising question. "Do you know anybody called John Macnab?"

Sir Archibald Roylance was a resourceful mountebank and did not hesitate.

"Yes. The distiller, you mean? Dhuniewassel Whisky? I've seen his advertisements—'They drink Dhuniewassel, In cottage and castle——' That chap?"

"No, no somebody quite different. Listen, please, if you're not too wet, for I want you to help me. Papa has had the most extraordinary letter from somebody called John Macnab, saying he means to kill a stag in our forest between certain

dates, and daring us to prevent him. He is going to hand over the beast to us if he gets it and pay fifty pounds, but if he fails he is to pay a hundred pounds. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Some infernal swindler," said Archie darkly.

"No. He can't be. You see the fifty pounds arrived this morning."

"God bless my soul!"

"Yes. In Bank of England notes, posted from London. Papa at first wanted to tell him to go to—well, where papa tells people he doesn't like to go. But I thought the offer so sporting that I persuaded him to take up the challenge. Indeed, I wrote the reply myself. Mr. Macnab said that the money was to go to a charity, so Agatha is having the fifty pounds for her native weaving and dyeing—she's frightfully keen about that. But if we win the other fifty pounds papa says the best charity he can think of is to prevent me breaking my neck on hirelings, and I'm to have it to buy a hunter. So I'm very anxious to find out about Mr. John Macnab."

"Probably some rich Colonial who hasn't learned manners."

"I don't think so. His manners are very good, to judge by his letter. I think he is a gentleman, but perhaps a little mad. We simply *must* beat him, for I've got to have that fifty pounds. And—and I want you to help me."

"Oh, well, you know—I mean to say—I'm not much of a fellow. . . ."

"You're very clever, and you've done all kinds of things. I feel that if you advised us we should

win easily, for I'm sure you had far harder jobs in the war."

To have a pretty young woman lauding his abilities and appealing with melting eyes for his aid was a new experience in Sir Archie's life. It was so delectable an experience that he almost forgot its awful complications. When he remembered them he flushed and stammered.

"Really, I'd love to, but I wouldn't be any earthly good. I'm an old crock, you see. But you needn't worry—your Glenraden gillies will make short work of this bandit. . . . By Jove, I hope you get your hunter, Miss Raden. You've got to have it somehow. Tell you what, if I've any bright idea I'll let you know."

"Thank you so much. And may I consult you if I'm in difficulties?"

"Yes, of course. I mean to say, No. Hang it, I don't know, for I don't like interfering with your father's challenge."

"That means you will. Now, you mustn't wait another moment. Good-bye. Will you come over to lunch at Glenraden?"

Then she broke off and stared at him. "I forgot. Haven't you smallpox?"

"What! Smallpox? Oh, I see! Has old Mother Claybody been putting that about?"

"She came to tea yesterday twittering with terror, and warned us all not to go within a mile of Crask."

Sir Archie laughed somewhat hollowly. "I had a bad toothache and my head tied up, and I dare say I said something silly, but I never thought she would take it for gospel. You see for yourself that I've nothing the matter with me."

"You'll soon have pneumonia the matter with you, unless you hurry home. Good-bye. We'll expect you to lunch the day after to-morrow." And with a wave of her hand she was gone.

The extraordinary fact was that Sir Archie was not depressed by the new tangle which encumbered him. On the contrary, he was in the best of spirits. He hobbled gaily up the by-road to Crask, listened to Leithen, when he met him, with less than half an ear, and was happy with his own thoughts. I am at a loss to know how to describe the first shattering impact of youth and beauty on a susceptible mind. The old plan was to borrow the language of the world's poetry, the new seems to be to have recourse to the difficult jargon of psychologists and physicians; but neither, I fear, would suit Sir Archie's case. He did not think of nymphs and goddesses or of linnets in spring; still less did he plunge into the depths of a subconscious self which he was not aware of possessing. The unromantic epithet which rose to his lips was "jolly." This was for certain the jolliest girl he had ever met—regular young sportswoman and amazingly good-looking, and he was dashed if she wouldn't get her hunter. For a delirious ten minutes, which carried him to the edge of the Crask lawn, he pictured his resourcefulness placed at her service, her triumphant success, and her bright-eyed gratitude.

Then he suddenly remembered that alliance with Miss Janet Raden was treachery to his three guests. The aid she had asked for could only be given at the expense of John Macnab. He was in the miserable position of having a leg in both camps, of having

unhappily received the confidences of both sides, and whatever he did he must make a mess of it. He could not desert his friends, so he must fail the lady ; wherefore there could be no luncheon for him the day after to-morrow, since another five minutes' talk with her would entangle him beyond hope. There was nothing for it but to have a return of smallpox. He groaned aloud.

"A twinge of that beastly toothache," he explained in reply to his companion's inquiry.

When the party met in the smoking-room that night after dinner two very weary men occupied the deepest arm-chairs. Lamancha was struggling with sleep ; Palliser-Yeates was limp with fatigue, far too weary to be sleepy. "I've had the devil of a day," said the latter. "Wattie took me at a racing gallop about thirty miles over bogs and crags. Lord ! I'm stiff and footsore. I believe I crawled more than ten miles, and I've no skin left on my knees. But we spied the deuce of a lot of ground, and I see my way to the rudiments of a plan. You start off, Charles, while I collect my thoughts."

But Lamancha was supine.

"I'm too drunk with sleep to talk," he said. "I prospected all the south side of Haripol—all this side of the Reascuill, you know. I got a good spy from Sgurr Mór, and I tried to get up Sgurr Dearg, but stuck on the rocks. That's a fearsome mountain, if you like. Didn't see a blessed soul all day—no rifles out—but I heard a shot from the Machray ground. I got my glasses on to several fine beasts. It struck me that the best chance would be in the

corrie between Sgurr Mór and Sgurr Dearg—there's a nice low pass at the head to get a stag through, and the place is rather tucked away from the rest of the forest. That's as far as I've got at present. I want to sleep."

Palliser-Yeates was in a very different mood. With an Ordnance map spread out on his knees he expounded the result of his researches, waving his pipe excitedly.

"It's a stiff problem, but there's just the ghost of a hope. Wattie admitted that on the way home. Look here, you fellows—Glenraden is divided, like Gaul, into three parts. There's the Home beat—all the low ground of the Raden glen and the little hills behind the house. Then there's the Carnbeg beat to the east, which is the best I fancy—very easy going, not very high, and with peat roads and tracks where you could shift a beast. Last there's Carnmore, miles from anywhere, with all the highest tops and as steep as Torridon. It would be the devil of a business, if I got a stag there, to move it. Wattie and I went round the whole marches, mostly on our bellies. No, we weren't seen—Wattie took care of that. What a noble *shikari* the old chap is!"

"Well, what's your conclusion?" Leithen asked.

Palliser-Yeates shook his head. "That's just where I'm stumped. Try to put yourself in old Raden's place. He has only one stalker and two gillies for the whole forest, for he's very short-handed, and as a matter of fact he stalks his beasts himself. He'll consider where John Macnab is likeliest to have his try, and he'll naturally decide on the Carnmore beat, for that's by far the most

secluded. You may take it from me that he has only enough men to watch one beat properly. But he'll reflect that John Macnab has got to get his stag away, and he'll wonder how he'll manage it on Carnmore, for there's only one bad track up from Inverlarrig. Therefore he'll conclude that John Macnab may be more likely to try Carnbeg, though it's a bit more public. You see, his decision isn't any easier than mine. On the whole, I'm inclined to think he'll plump for Carnmore, for he must think John Macnab a fairly desperate fellow who will aim first at killing his stag in peace, and will trust to Providence for the rest. So at the moment I favour Carnbeg."

Leithen wrinkled his brow. "There are three of us," he said. "That gives us a chance of a little finesse. What about letting Charles or me make a demonstration against Carnmore, while you wait at Carnbeg?"

"Good idea! I thought of that too."

"You'd better assume Colonel Raden to be in very full possession of his wits," Leithen continued. "The simple bluff won't do—he'll see through it. He'll think that John Macnab is the same wary kind of old bird as himself. I found out in the war that it didn't do to underrate your opponent's brains. He's pretty certain to expect a feint and not to be taken in. I'm for something a little subtler."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that you feint in one place, so that your opponent believes it to be a feint and pays no attention—and then you sail in and get to work in that very place."

Palliser-Yeates whistled. "That wants thinking over. . . . How about yourself?"

"I've studied the river, and you never in your life saw such a hopeless proposition. All the good pools are as open as the Serpentine. Wattie stated the odds correctly."

"Nothing doing there?"

"Nothing doing, unless I take steps to shorten the odds. So I've taken in a partner."

The others stared, and even Lamancha woke up.

"Yes. I interviewed him in the stable before dinner. It's the little ragamuffin who sells fish—Fish Benjie is the name he goes by. Archie, I hope you don't mind, but I told him to resume his morning visits. They're my best chance for consultations."

"You're taking a pretty big risk, Ned," said his host. "D'you mean to say you've let that boy into the whole secret?"

"I've told him everything. It was the only way, for he had begun to suspect. I admit it's a gamble, but I believe I can trust the child. I think I know a sportsman when I see him."

Archie still shook his head. "There's something else I may as well tell you. I met one of the Raden girls to-day—the younger—she was on the bank when I fell into the Larrig. She asked me point-blank if I knew anybody called John Macnab?"

Lamancha was wide awake. "What did you say?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, lied of course. Said I supposed she meant the distiller. Then she told me the whole story—said she had written the letter her father signed. She's mad keen to win the extra fifty quid, for it

means a hunter for her this winter down in Warwickshire. Yes, and she asked me to help. I talked a lot of rot about my game leg and that sort of thing, but I sort of promised to go and lunch at Glenraden the day after to-morrow."

"That's impossible," said Lamancha.

"I know it is, but there's only one way out of it. I've got to have smallpox again."

"You've got to go to bed and stay there for a month," said Palliser-Yeates severely. "Now, look here, Archie. We simply can't have you getting mixed up with the enemy, especially the enemy women. You're much too susceptible and far too great an ass."

"Of course not," said Sir Archie, with a touch of protest in his voice. "I see that well enough, but it's a black look-out for me. I wish to Heaven you fellows had chosen to take your cure somewhere else. I'm simply wrecking all my political career. I had a letter from my agent to-night, and I should be touring the constituency instead of playing the goat here. All I've got to say is that you've dashed lot more than old Raden against you. You've got that girl, crazy about her hunter, and anyone can see that she's as clever as a monkey."

But the laird of Crask was not thinking of Miss Janet Raden's wits as he went meditatively to bed. He was wondering why her eyes were so blue, and as he ascended the stairs he thought he had discovered the reason. Her hair was spun-gold, but she had dark eyelashes.

ON the roads of the north of Scotland, any time after the last snow-wreaths have melted behind the dykes, you will meet a peculiar kind of tinkler. They are not the copper-nosed scarecrows of the lowlands, sullen and cringing, attended by sad infants in ramshackle perambulators. Nor are they in any sense gipsies, for they have not the Romany speech or colouring. They travel the roads with an establishment, usually a covered cart and one or more lean horses, and you may find their encampments any day by any burnside. Of a rainy night you can see their queer little tents, shaped like a segment of sausage, with a fire hissing at the door, and the horses cropping the roadside grass; of a fine morning the women will be washing their duds on the loch shore and their young fighting like ferrets among the shingle. You will meet with them in the back streets of the little towns, and at the back doors of wayside inns, but mostly in sheltered hollows of the moor or green nooks among the birches, for they are artists in choosing camping-grounds. They are children of Esau who combine a dozen crafts—tinkering, fish-hawking, besom-making, and the like—with their natural trades of horse-coping and poaching. At once brazen and obsequious, they beg rather as an art than a necessity; they will whine to a keeper with pockets full of pheasants' eggs, and seek permission to camp from a laird with a melting tale of hardships, while one of his salmon lies hidden in the bracken on their cart floor. The men are an upstanding race, keen-eyed, resourceful, with

humour in their cunning ; the women, till the life bears too hardly on them, are handsome and soft-spoken ; and the children are burned and weathered like imps of the desert. Their speech is neither lowland nor highland, but a sing-song Scots of their own, and if they show the Celt in their secret ways there is a hint of Norse blood in the tawny hair and blue eyes so common among them.

Ebenezer Bogle was born into this life, and for fifty-five years travelled the roads from the Reay country to the Mearns and from John o' Groats to the sea-lochs of Appin. Sickness overtook him one October when camped in the Black Isle, and, feeling the hand of death on him, he sent for two people. One was the nearest Free Kirk minister—for Ebenezer was theologically of the old school ; the other was a banker from Muirtown. What he said to the minister I do not know ; but what the banker said to him may be gathered from the fact that he informed his wife before he died that in the Muirtown bank there lay to his credit a sum of nearly three thousand pounds. Ebenezer had been a sober and careful man, and a genius at horse-coping. He had bought the little rough shelties of the North and the Isles, and sold them at lowland fairs, he had dabbled in black cattle, he had done big trade in sheep-skins when a snowstorm decimated the Sutherland flocks, and he had engaged, perhaps, in less reputable ventures, which might be forbidden by the law of the land, but were not contrary, so he believed, to the Bible. Year by year his bank balance had mounted, for he spent little, and now he had a fortune to bequeath. He made no will ; all went to his wife, with the

understanding that it would be kept intact for his son; and in this confidence Ebenezer closed his eyes.

The wife did not change her habit of life. The son Benjamin accompanied her as before in the long rounds between May and October, and in the winter abode in the fishing quarter of Muirtown, and intermittently attended school. Presently his mother took a second husband, a Catholic Macdonald from the West, for the road is a lonely occupation for a solitary woman. Her new man was a cheerful being—very little like the provident Ebenezer—much addicted to the bottle and a lover of all things but legitimate trade. But he respected the dead man's wishes and made no attempt to touch the hoard in the Muirtown bank; he was kind, too, to the boy, and taught him many things that are not provided for in the educational system of Scotland. From him Benjie learned how to take a nesting grouse, how to snare a dozen things, from hares to roebuck, how to sniggle salmon in the clear pools, and how to poach a hind when the deer came down in hard weather to the meadows. He learned how to tell the hour by the sun, and to find his way by the stars, and what weather was foretold by the starlings packing at nightfall, or the crows sitting with their beaks to the wind, or a badger coming home after daylight. The boy knew how to make cunning whistles from ash and rowan with which to imitate a snipe's bleat or the call of an otter, and he knew how at all times and in all weathers to fend for himself and find food and shelter. A tough little nomad he became under this tutelage, knowing no boys' games, with scarcely an acquaintance of his age, but able to

deal on equal terms with every fisherman, gillie, and tinkler north of the Highland line.

It chanced that in the spring of this year Mrs. Bogle had fallen ill for the first time in her life. It was influenza, and, being neglected, was followed by pneumonia, so that when May came she was in no condition to take the road. By ill luck her husband had been involved in a drunken row, when he had assaulted two of his companions with such violence and success that he was sent for six months to prison. In these circumstances there was nothing for it but that Benjie should set out alone with the cart, and it is a proof of the stoutheartedness of the family tradition that his mother never questioned the propriety of this arrangement. He departed with her blessing, and weekly despatched to her a much-blotted scrawl describing his doings. There was something of his father's hard fibre in the child, for he was a keen bargainer and as wary as a fox against cajolery. He met friends of his family who let him camp beside them, and with their young he did battle, when they dared to threaten his dignity. Benjie fought in no orthodox way, but like a weasel, using every weapon of tooth and claw, but in his sobbing furies he was unconquerable, and was soon left in peace. Presently he found that he preferred to camp alone, so with his old cart and horse he made his way up and down the long glens of the West to the Larrig. There, he remembered, the fish trade had been profitable in past years, so he sat himself down by the roadside, to act as middle-man between the fishing-cobles of Inverlarrig and the kitchens of the shooting lodges. It would be untrue to say that

this was his only means of livelihood, and I fear that the contents of Benjie's pot, as it bubbled of an evening in the Wood of Larrigmore, would not have borne inspection by any keeper who chanced to pass. The weekly scrawls went regularly to his now convalescent mother, and once a parcel arrived for him at the Inverlarrig post office containing a gigantic new shirt, which he used as a blanket. For the rest, he lived as Robinson Crusoe lived, on the country-side around him, asking no news of the outer world.

On the morning of the 27th of August he might have been seen, a little after seven o'clock, driving his cart up the fine beech avenue which led to Glenraden Castle. It was part of his morning round, but hitherto he had left his cart at the lodge-gate, and carried his fish on foot to the house ; wherefore he had some slight argument with the lodge-keeper before he was permitted to enter. He drove circumspectly to the back regions, left his fish at the kitchen door, and then proceeded to the cottage of the stalker, one Macpherson, which stood by itself in a clump of firs. There he waited for some time till Mrs. Macpherson came out to feed her hens. A string of haddocks changed hands, and Benjie was bidden indoors, where he was given a cup of tea, while old Macpherson smoked his early pipe and asked questions. Half an hour later Benjie left, with every sign of amity, and drove very slowly down the woodland road towards the haugh where the Raden, sweeping from the narrows of the glen, spreads into broad pools and shining shallows. There he left the cart and squatted inconspicuously in the heather, in a

place which commanded a prospect of the home woods. From his observations he was aware that one of the young ladies regularly took her morning walk in this quarter.

Meantime in the pleasant upstairs dining-room of the Castle breakfast had begun. Colonel Alastair Raden, having read prayers to a row of servants from a chair in the window—there was a family tradition that he once broke off in a petition to call excitedly his Maker's attention to a capercailzie on the lawn—and having finished his porridge, which he ate standing, with bulletins interjected about the weather, was doing good work on bacon and eggs. Breakfast, he used to declare, should consist of no kickshaws like kidneys and omelettes ; only bacon and eggs, and plenty of 'em. The master of the house was a lean old gentleman dressed in an ancient loud-patterned tweed jacket and a very faded kilt. Still erect as a post, he had a barrack-square voice, a high-boned, aquiline face, and a kindly but irritable blue eye. His daughters were devoting what time was left to them from attending to the breakfasts of three terriers to an animated discussion of a letter which lay before them. The morning meal at Glenraden was rarely interrupted by correspondence, for the post did not arrive till the evening, but this missive had been delivered by hand.

"He can't come," the younger cried. "He says he's seedy again. It may really be smallpox this time."

"Who can't come, and who has smallpox?" her father demanded.

"Sir Archibald Roylance. I told you I met him

and asked him to lunch here to-day. We really ought to get to know our nearest neighbour, and he seems a very pleasant young man."

"I think he is hiding a dark secret," said the elder Miss Raden. "Nobody who calls there ever finds him in—except Lady Claybody, and then he told her he had smallpox. Old Mr. Bandicott said he went up the long hill to Crask yesterday, and found nobody at home; though he was perfectly certain he saw one figure slinking into the wood and another moving away from a window. I wonder if Sir Archibald is really all right. We don't know anything about him, do we?"

"Of course he's all right—bound to be—dashed gallant, sporting fellow. Sorry he's not coming to luncheon—I want to meet him. He's probably afraid of Nettie, and I don't blame him, for she's a brazen hussy, and he does well to be shy of old Bandicott. I'm scared to death by the fellow myself."

"You know you've promised to let him dig in the Piper's Ring, papa."

"I know I have, and I would have promised to let him dig up my lawn to keep him quiet. Never met a man with such a flow of incomprehensible talk. He had the audacity to tell me that I was no more Celtic than he was, but sprung from some blackguard Norse raiders a thousand years back. Judging by the sketch he gave me of their habits, I'd sooner the Radens were descended from Polish Jews."

"I thought him a darling," said his elder daughter, "and with such a beautiful face."

"He may be a darling for all I know, but his

head is stuffed with maggots. If you admired him so much, why didn't you take him off my hands? I liked the look of the young fellow and wanted to have a word with him. More by token"—the Colonel was hunting about for the marmalade—"what were you two plotting with him in the corner after dinner?"

"We were talking about John Macnab."

The Colonel's face became wrathful.

"Then I call it dashed unfilial conduct of you not to have brought me in. There was I, deafened with the old man's chatter—all about a fellow called Harald Blacktooth or Bottlenose or some such name, that he swears is buried in my grounds and means to dig up—when I might have been having a really fruitful conversation. What was young Bandicott's notion of John Macnab?"

"Mr. Junius thinks he is a lunatic," said the elder Miss Raden. She was in every way her sister's opposite, dark of hair and eye where Janet was fair, tall where Janet was little, slow and quiet of voice where Janet was quick and gusty.

"I entirely differ from him. I think John Macnab is perfectly sane, and probably a good fellow, though a dashed insolent one. What's Bandicott doing about his river?"

"Patrolling it day and night between the 1st and 3rd of September. He says he's taking no chances, though he'd bet Wall Street to a nickel that the poor poop hasn't the frozenest outside."

"Nettie, he said nothing of the kind!" Miss Agatha was indignant. "He talks beautiful English, with no trace of an accent—all Bostonians do, he told me."

"Anyhow, he asked what steps we were taking and advised us to get busy. We come before him, you know. . . . Heavens, papa, it begins to-morrow night! Oh, and I did so want to consult Sir Archibald. I'm sure he could help."

Colonel Raden, having made a satisfactory breakfast, was lighting a pipe.

"You need not worry, my dear. I'm an old campaigner and have planned out the thing thoroughly. I've been in frequent consultation with Macpherson, and yesterday we had Alan and James Fraser in, and they entirely agreed."

He produced from his pocket a sheet of foolscap on which had been roughly drawn a map of the estate.

"Now, listen to me. We must assume this fellow Macnab to be in possession of his senses, and to have more or less reconnoitred the ground—though I don't know how the devil he can have managed it, for the gillies have kept their eyes open, and nobody's been seen near the place. Well, here are the three beats. Unless young Bandicott is right and the man's a lunatic, he won't try the Home beat, for the simple reason that a shot there would be heard by twenty people and he could not move a beast twenty yards without being caught. There remain Carnmore and Carnbeg. Macpherson was clear that he would try Carnmore, as being farthest away from the house. But I, with my old campaigning experience"—here Colonel Raden looked remarkably cunning—"pointed out at once that such reasoning was rudimentary. I said 'He'll bluff us, and just because he thinks that *we* think he'll try Carnmore,

he'll try Carnbeg. Therefore, since we can only afford to watch one beat thoroughly, we'll watch Carnbeg. What do you think of that, my dears? "

" I think you're very clever, papa," said Agatha. " I'm sure you're right."

" And you, Nettie? "

Janet was knitting her brows and looking thoughtful.

" I'm . . . not . . . so . . . sure. You see we must assume that John Macnab is very ingenious. He probably made his fortune in the colonies by every kind of dodge. He's sure to be very clever."

" Well but, my dear," said her father, " it's just that cleverness that I propose to match."

" But do you think you have quite matched it? You have tried to imagine what John Macnab would be thinking, and he will have done just the same by you. Why shouldn't he have guessed the conclusion you have reached and be deciding to go one better? "

" How do you mean, Nettie? " asked her puzzled parent. He was inclined to be annoyed, but experience had taught him that his younger daughter's wits were not to be lightly disregarded.

Nettie took the estate map from his hand and found a stump of pencil in the pocket of her jumper.

" Please look at this, papa. Here is A and B. B offers a better chance, so Macpherson says John Macnab will take B. You say, acutely, that John Macnab is not a fool, and will try to bluff us by taking A. I say that John Macnab will have anticipated your acumen."

“ Yes, yes,” said her father impatiently. “ And then ? ”

“ And will take B after all.”

The Colonel stood rapt in unpleasant meditation for the space of five seconds.

“ God bless my soul ! ” he cried. “ I see what you mean. Confound it, of course he’ll go for Carnmore. Lord, this is a puzzle. I must see Macpherson at once. Are you sure you’re right, Nettie ? ”

“ I’m not in the least sure. We’ve only a choice of uncertainties, and must gamble. But, as far as I see, if we must plump for one we should plump for Carnmore.”

Colonel Raden departed for his study, after summoning Macpherson to that shrine of the higher thought, and Janet Raden, after one or two brief domestic interviews, collected her two terriers and set out for her morning walk. The morning was as fresh and bright as April, the rain in the night had set every burn singing, and the thickets and lawns were still damp where the sun had not penetrated. Her morning walk was wont to be a scamper, a thing of hops, skips, and jumps, rather than a sedate progress ; but on this occasion, though two dogs and the whole earth invited to hilarity, she walked slowly and thoughtfully. The mossy broken tops of Carnbeg showed above a wood of young firs, and to the right rose the high blue peaks of the Carnmore ground. On which of these on the morrow would John Macnab begin his depredations ? He had two days for his exploit ; probably he would make his effort on the second day, and devote the first to confusing the minds of

the defence. That meant that the problem would have to be thought out new each day, for the alert intelligence of John Macnab—she now pictured him as a sort of Sherlock Holmes in knickerbockers—would not stand still. The prospect exhilarated, but it also alarmed her; the desire to win a new hunter was now a fixed resolution; but she wished she had a colleague. Agatha was no use, and her father, while admirable in tactics, was weak in strategy; she longed more than ever for the help of that frail vessel, Sir Archie.

Her road led her by a brawling torrent through the famous Glenraden beechwood to the spongy meadows of the haugh, beyond which could be seen the shining tides of the Raden sweeping to the high-backed bridge across which ran the road to Carnmore. The haugh was all bog-myrtle and heather and bracken, sprinkled with great boulders which the river during the ages had brought down from the hills. Half a mile up it stood the odd tumulus called the Piper's Ring, crowned with an ancient gnarled fir, where reposed, according to the elder Bandicott, the dust of that dark progenitor, Harald Blacktooth. If Mr. Bandicott proposed to excavate there he had his work cut out; the place was encumbered with giant stones, for a thousand floods had washed its sides since it first received the dead Viking. Great birch woods from both sides of the valley descended to the stream, thereby making the excellence of the Home beat, for the woodland stag is a heavier beast than his brother of the high tops.

Close to the road, in a small hollow where one of the rivulets from the woods cut its way through the

haugh, she came on an ancient cart resting on its shafts, an ancient horse grazing on a patch of turf among the peat, and a small boy diligently whittling his way through a pile of heather roots. The urchin sprang to his feet and saluted like a soldier.

"Please, lady," he explained in a high falsetto whine, "I've gotten permission from Mr. Macpherson to make heather besoms on this muir. He's aye been awfu' kind to me, lady."

"You're the boy who sells fish? I've seen you on the road."

"Aye, lady, I'm Fish Benjie. I sell my fish in the mornin's and the evenin's, and I've a' the day for other jobs. I've aye wanted to come here, for it's the grandest heather in the country-side; and Mr. Macpherson, he kens I'll dae nae harm, and I've promised no to kindle a fire."

The child with the beggar's voice looked at her with such sage and solemn eyes that Janet, who had a hopeless weakness for small boys, sat down on a sun-warmed hillock and stared at him, while he turned resolutely to business.

"If you're hungry, Benjie," she said, "and they won't let you make a fire, you can come up to the Castle and get tea from Mrs. Fraser. Tell her I sent you."

"Thank you, lady, but if *you* please, I was gaun to my tea at Mrs. Macpherson's. She's fell fond o' my haddies, and she tell't me to tak a look in when I stoppit work. I'm ettlin' to be here for a guid while."

"Will you come every day?"

"Aye, every day about eight o'clock, and bide

till maybe five in the afternoon when I go down to the cobbles at Inverlarrig."

"Now, look here, Benjie. When you're sitting quietly working here I want you to keep your eyes open, and if you see any strange man, tell Mr. Macpherson. By strange man I mean somebody who doesn't belong to the place. We're rather troubled by poachers just now."

Benjie raised a ruminant eye from his besoms.

"Aye, lady. I seen a queer man already this mornin'. He cam up the road and syne started off over the bog. He was sweatin' sore, and there was twa men from Strathlarrig wi' him carryin' picks and shovels. . . . Losh, there he is comin' back."

Following Benjie's pointing finger, Janet saw, approaching her from the direction of the Piper's Ring, a solitary figure which laboured heavily among the peat-bogs. Presently it was revealed as an elderly man wearing a broad grey wide-awake and a suit of flannel knickerbockers. His enormous horn spectacles clearly did not help his eyesight, for he had almost fallen over the shafts of the fish-cart before he perceived Janet Raden. He removed his hat, bowed with an antique courtesy, and asked permission to recover his breath.

"I was on my way to see your father," he said at length. "This morning I have prospected the barrow of Harald Blacktooth, and it is clear to me that I can make no progress unless I have Colonel Raden's permission to use explosives. Only the very slightest use, I promise you. I have located, I think, the ceremonial entrance, but it is blocked with boulders which it would take a gang of navvies to raise with crowbars. A discreet application of

dynamite would do the work in half an hour. I cannot think that Colonel Raden would object to my using it when I encounter such obstacles. I assure you it will not spoil the look of the barrow."

"I'm sure papa will be delighted. You're certain the noise won't frighten the deer? You know the Piper's Ring is in the forest."

"Not in the least, my dear young lady. The reports will be very slight, scarcely louder than a rifle-shot. I ought to tell you that I am an old hand at explosives, for in my young days I mined in Colorado, and recently I have employed them in my Alaska researches. . . ."

"If we go home now," said Janet, rising, "we'll just catch papa before he goes out. You're very warm, Mr. Bandicott, and I think you would be the better for a rest and a drink."

"I certainly should, my dear. I was so eager to begin that I bolted my breakfast, and started off before Junius was ready. He proposes to meet me here."

Benjie, left alone, wrought diligently at his heather roots, whistling softly to himself, and every now and then raising his head to scan the haugh and the lower glen. Presently a tall young man appeared, who was identified as the younger American, and who was duly directed to follow his father to the Castle. The two returned in a little while, accompanied by Agatha Raden, and, while the elder Mr. Bandicott hastened to the Piper's Ring, the young people sauntered to the Raden bridge and appeared to be deep in converse. "Thae twa's weel agreed," was Benjie's comment. A little before one o'clock the party adjourned to

the Castle, presumably for luncheon, and Benjie, whose noon-tide meal was always sparing, nibbled a crust of bread and a rind of cheese. In the afternoon Macpherson and one of the gillies strolled past, and the head-stalker proved wonderfully gracious, adjuring him, as Janet had done, to keep his eyes open and report the presence of any stranger. "There'll be the three folk from Strathlarrig howkin' awa there, but if ye see anybody else, away up to the house and tell the wife. They'll no be here for any good." Benjie promised fervently. "I've grand een, Mr. Macpherson, sir, and though they was to be crawlin' like a serpent I'd be on them." The head-stalker observed that he was a "gleg one," and went his ways.

Despite his industry Benjie was remarkably observant that day, but he was not looking for poachers. He had suddenly developed an acute interest in the deer. His unaided eyes were as good as the ordinary man's telescope, and he kept a keen watch on the fringes of the great birch woods. The excavation at the Piper's Ring kept away any beasts from the east side of the haugh, but on the west bank of the stream he saw two lots of hinds grazing, with one or two young stags among them, and even on the east bank, close in to the edge of the river, he saw hinds with calves. He concluded that on the fringes of the Raden the feeding must be extra good, and, as a steady west wind was blowing, the deer there would not be alarmed by Mr. Bandicott's quest. Just after he had finished his bread and cheese he was rewarded with the spectacle of a hummel, a great fellow of fully twenty stone, who rolled in a peat hole and then

stood blowing in the shallow water as unconcerned as if he had been on the top of Carnmore. Later in the afternoon he saw a good ten-pointer in the same place, and a little later an eight-pointer with a damaged horn. He concluded that that particular hag was a favourite mud-bath for stags, and that with the wind in the west it was in no way interfered with by the activities at the Piper's Ring.

About four o'clock Benjie backed the old horse into the shafts, and jogged up the beech-avenue to Mrs. Macpherson's, where he was stayed with tea and scones. There was a gathering outside the door of Macpherson himself and the two gillies, and a strange excitement seemed to have fallen on that stolid community. Benjie could not avoid—indeed I am not sure that he tried to avoid—hearing scraps of their talk. "I've been a' round Carnmore," said Alan, "and I seen some fine beasts. They're mostly in a howe atween the two tops, and a man at the Grey Beallach could keep an eye on all the good ground." "Aye, but there's the Carn Moss, and the burnheads—there will be beasts there too," said James Fraser. "There will have to be a man there, for him at the Grey Beallach would not ken what was happening." "And what about Corrie Gall?" asked Macpherson fiercely. "Ye canna post men in Carnmore—they will have to keep moving; it is that awful broken ground." "Well, there's you and me and James," said Alan, "and there's Himself." "And that's the lot of us, and every man wanted," said Macpherson. "It's what I was always saying—ye will need every man for Carnmore, and must let Carnbeg alone, or ye

can watch Carnbeg and not go near Carnmore. We're far ower few." "I wass thinking," said James Fraser, "that the youngest leddy might be watching Carnbeg." "Aye, James"—this satirically from Macpherson—"and how would the young leddy be keeping a wild man from killing a stag and getting him away?" "'Deed, I don't ken," said the puzzled James, "without she took a gun with her and had a shot at him."

Benjie drove quietly to Inverlarrig for his supply of fish, and did not return to his head-quarters in the Wood of Larrigmore till nearly seven o'clock. At eight, having cooked and eaten his supper, he made a simple toilet, which consisted in washing the fish-scales and the stains of peat from his hands, holding his head in the river, parting his damp hair with a broken comb, and putting over his shoulders a waterproof cape, which had dropped from some passing conveyance and had been found by him on the road. Thus accoutred, he crossed the river and by devious paths ascended to Crask.

He ensconced himself in the stable, where he was greeted sourly by the Bluidy Mackenzie, who was tied up in one of the stalls. There he occupied himself in whistling strathspeys and stuffing a foul clay pipe with the stump of a cigar which he had picked up in the yard. Benjie smoked not for pleasure, but from a sense of duty, and a few whiffs were all he could manage with comfort. The gloaming had fallen before he heard his name called, and Wattie Lithgow appeared. "Ye're there, ye monkey? The gentlemen are askin' for ye. Quick and follow me. They're in an awfu' ill key the nicht and maunna be keepit waitin'."

There certainly seemed trouble in the smoking-room when Benjie was ushered in. Lamancha was standing on the hearth-rug with a letter crumpled in his hand, and Sir Archie, waving a missive, was excitedly confronting him. The other two sat in arm-chairs with an air of protest and dejection.

"I forgot all about the infernal thing till I got Montgomery's letter. The 4th of September! Hang it, my assault on old Claybody is timed to start on the 5th. How on earth can I get to Muirtown and back and deliver a speech, and be ready for the 5th? Besides, it betrays my presence in this part of the world. It simply can't be done . . . and yet I don't know how on earth to get out of it? Apparently the thing was arranged months ago."

"You're for it all right, my son," cried Sir Archie, "and so am I. Here's the beastly announcement. '*A Great Unionist Demonstration will be held in the Town Hall, Muirtown, on Thursday, September 4th, to be addressed by the Right Hon. the Earl of Lamancha, M.P., His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Dominions. The chair will be taken at 3 p.m. by His Grace the Duke of Angus, K.G. Among the speakers will be Colonel Wavertree, M.P., the Hon. W. J. Murdoch, ex-Premier of New Caledonia, and Captain Sir Archibald Roylance, D.S.O., prospective Unionist candidate for Wester Ross.*' Oh, will he? Not by a long chalk! Catch me going to such a fiasco, with Charles hiding here and the show left to the tender mercies of two rotten bad speakers and a prosy chairman."

"Did you forget about it too?" Leithen asked.

"'Course I did," said Sir Archie wildly. "How

could I think of anything with you fellows turning my house into a den of thieves? I forgot about it just as completely as Charles, only it doesn't matter about me, and it matters the devil of a lot about him. I don't stand an earthly chance of winning the seat, if first of all I mustn't canvass because of smallpox, and, second, my big meeting, on which all my fellows counted, is wrecked by Charles playing the fool."

Lamancha's dark face broke into a smile.

"Don't worry, old chap. I won't let you down. But it looks as if I must let down John Macnab, and just when I was gettin' keen about him. . . . Hang it, no! There must be a way. I'm not going to be beaten either by Claybody or this damned Tory rally. Ned, you slacker, what's your advice?"

"Have a try at the double event," Leithen drawled. "You'll probably make a mess of both, but it's a sporting proposition."

Archie's face brightened. "You don't realise how sporting a proposition it is. The Claybodys will be there, and they'll be all over you—brother nobleman, you know, and you going to poach their stags next day! Hang it, why shouldn't you turn the affair into camouflage? 'Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise,' says the hymn. . . . We'll have to think the thing out ve-ry carefully.—Anyway, Charles, you've got to help me with my speech. I don't mind so much lying doggo here if I can put in a bit of good work on the 4th. . . . Now, Benjie, my lad, for your report."

Benjie, not without a certain shyness, cleared his throat and began. He narrated how, following his instructions, he had secured Macpherson's

permission to cut heather for besoms on the Raden haugh. He had duly taken up his post there, had remained till four o'clock, and had seen such and such people and heard this and that talk. He recounted what he could remember of the speeches of Macpherson and the gillies.

"They've got accustomed to the sight of you, I suppose," Palliser-Yeates said at length.

"Aye, they're accustomed right enough. Both the young lady and Macpherson was tellin' me to keep a look-out for poachers." Benjie chuckled.

"Then to-morrow you begin to move up to the high ground by the Carnmore peat-road. Still keep busy at your besoms. You understand what I want you for, Benjie? If I kill a stag I have to get it off Glenraden land, and your old fish-cart won't be suspected."

"Aye, I see that fine. But I've been thinkin' that there's maybe a better way."

"Go ahead, and let's have it."

Benjie began his speech nervously, but he soon warmed to it, and borrowed a cigar-box and the fire-irons to explain his case. The interest of his hearers kindled, until all four men were hanging on his words. When he concluded and had answered sundry questions, Sir Archie drew a deep breath and laughed excitedly.

"I suppose there's nothing in that that isn't quite cricket. . . . I thought I knew something about bluff, but this—this absolutely vanquishes the band. Benjie, I'm going to have you taught poker. You've the right kind of mind for it."

SHORTLY after midnight of the 28th day of August three men foregathered at the door of Macpherson's cottage, and after a few words took each a different road into the dark wastes of wood and heather. Macpherson contented himself with a patrol of the low ground in the glen, for his legs were not as nimble as they once had been and his back had a rheumatically stiffness. Alan departed with great strides for the Carnbeg tops, and James Fraser, the youngest and the leanest, set out for Carnmore, with the speed of an Indian hunter. . . . Darkness gave place to the translucence of early dawn: the badger trotted home from his wanderings: the hill-fox barked in the cairns to summon his household: sleepy pipits awoke: the peregrine who lived above the Grey Beallach drifted down into the glens to look for breakfast: hinds and calves moved up from the hazel shaws to the high fresh pastures: the tiny rustling noises of night disappeared in that hush which precedes the awakening of life: and then came the flood of morning gold from behind the dim eastern mountains, and in an instant the earth had wheeled into a new day. A thin spire of smoke rose from Mrs. Macpherson's chimney, and presently the three wardens of the marches arrived for breakfast. They reported that the forest was still unviolated, that no alien foot had as yet entered its sacred confines. Herd-boys, the offspring of Alan and James Fraser, had taken up their post at key-points, so that if a human being was seen on the glacis of the fort the fact would at once be reported to the garrison.

"I'm thinkin' he'll no come to-day," said Macpherson after his third cup of tea. "It will be the morn. The day he will be tryin' to confuse our minds, and that will no be a difficult job wi' you, Alan, my son."

"He'll come in the da-ark," said Alan crossly.

"And how would he be gettin' a beast in the da-ark? The Laird was sayin' that this man John Macnab was a gra-and sportsman. He will not be shootin' at any little staggie, but takin' a sizeable beast, and it's not a howlet could be tellin' a calf from a stag in these da-ark nights. Na, he will not shoot in the night, but he might be travellin' in the night and gettin' his shot in the early mornin'."

"What for," Alan asked, "should he not be havin' his shot in the gloamin' and gettin' the beast off the ground in the da-ark?"

"Because we will be watchin' all hours of the day. Ye heard what the Laird said, Alan Macdonald, and you, James Fraser. This John Macnab is not to shoot a Glenraden beast at all, at all, but if he shoots one he is not to move it one foot. If it comes to fightin', you are young lads and must break the head of him. But the Laird said for God's sake you was to have no guns, but to fight like honest folk with your fists, and maybe a wee bit stick. The Laird was sayin' the law was on our side, except for shootin'. . . . Now, James Fraser, you will take the outer marches the day, and keep an eye on the peat-roads from Inverlarrig, and you, Alan, will watch Carnbeg, and I will be takin' the woods myself. The Laird was sayin' that it would be Carnmore the man Macnab would be tryin', most likely at skreigh of day the morn,

and he would be hidin' the beast, if he got one, in some hag, and waitin' till the da-ark to shift him. So the morn we will all be on Carnmore, and I can tell you the Laird has the ground planned out so that a snipe would not be movin' without us seein' him."

The early morning broadened into day, and the glen slept in the windless heat of late August. Janet Raden, sauntering down from the Castle towards the river about eleven o'clock, thought that she had never seen the place so sabbatically peaceful. To her unquiet soul the calm seemed unnatural, like a thick cloak covering some feverish activity. All the household were abroad since breakfast—her father on a preliminary reconnaissance of Carnmore, Agatha and Mr. Junius Bandicott on a circuit of Carnbeg, while the gillies and their youthful allies sat perched with telescopes on eyries surveying every approach to the forest. The plans seemed perfect, but the dread of John Macnab, that dark conspirator, would not be exorcised. It was she who had devised the campaign, based on her reading of the enemy's mind; but had she fathomed it, she asked herself. Might he not even now be preparing some master-stroke which would crumble their crude defences? Horrible stories which she had read of impersonation and the shifts of desperate characters recurred to her mind. Was John Macnab perhaps old Mr. Bandicott disguised as an archæologist? Or was he one of the Strathlarrig workmen?

She walked over the moor to the Piper's Ring and was greeted by a mild detonation and a shower of earth. Old Mr. Bandicott, very warm and

stripped to his shirt, was desperately busy and most voluble about his task. There was no impersonation here, nor in the two fiery-faced labourers who were burrowing their way towards the resting-place of Harald Blacktooth. Nevertheless, her suspicion was not allayed, she felt herself in the antechamber of plotters, and looked any moment to see on the fringes of the wood or on the white ribbon of road a mysterious furtive figure which she would know for a minion of the enemy.

But the minion did not appear. As Janet stood on the rise before the bridge of Raden with her hat removed to let the faint south-west wind cool her forehead, she looked upon a scene of utter loneliness and peace. The party at the Piper's Ring were hidden, and in all the green amphitheatre nothing stirred but the stream. Even Fish Benjie and his horse had been stricken into carven immobility. He had moved away from the road a few hundred yards into the moor, not far from the waterside, and his little figure, as he whittled at his brooms, appeared from where Janet stood to be as motionless as a boulder, while the old grey pony mused upon three legs as rapt and lifeless as an Elgin marble. The two seemed to have become one with nature, and to be as much part of the sleeping landscape as the clump of birches whose leaves did not even shimmer in that bright silent noontide.

The quiet did something to soothe Janet's restlessness, but after luncheon, which she partook of in solitary state, she found it returning. A kind of *folie de doute* assailed her, not unknown to generals

in the bad hours which intervene between the inception and execution of a plan. She had a strong desire to ride up to Crask and have a talk with Sir Archie, and was only restrained by the memory of that young man's last letter, and the hint it contained of grave bodily maladies. She did not know whether to believe in these maladies or not, but clearly she could not thrust her company upon one who had shown a marked distaste for it. . . . Yet she had her pony saddled and rode slowly in the direction of Strathlarrig, half hoping to see a limping figure on the highway. But not a soul was in sight on the long blinding stretch or at the bridge where the Crask road started up the hill. Janet turned homeward with a feeling that the world had suddenly become dispeopled. She did not turn her head once, and so failed to notice first one figure and then another, which darted across the high road, and disappeared in the thick coverts of the Crask hillside.

At the Castle she found Agatha and Junius Bandicott having tea, and presently her father arrived in a state of heat and exhaustion. Stayed with a whisky-and-soda, Colonel Raden became communicative. He had been over the high tops of Carnmore, had visited the Carn Moss and Corrie Gall, had penetrated the Grey Beallach, had heard the tales of the gillies and of the herd-boys in their eyries, and his report was "all clear." The deer were undisturbed, according to James Fraser, since the morning. Moreover, the peat-road from Inverlarrig had relapsed owing to recent rains into primeval bog which no wheeled vehicle and few ponies could traverse. The main fortress

seemed not only unassailed but unassailable, and Colonel Raden viewed the morrow with equanimity.

The Carnbeg party had a different story to tell, or rather the main members of it had no story at all. Agatha and Junius Bandicott appeared to have sauntered idly into the pleasant wilderness of juniper and heather which lay between the mossy summits, to have lunched at leisure by the famous Cailleach's Well, and to have sauntered home again. They reported that it had been divine weather, for a hill breeze had tempered the heat, and that they had observed the Claybodys' yacht far out at the entrance to Loch Larrig. Also Junius had seen his first blue hare, which he called a "jack rabbit." Of anything suspicious there had been neither sign nor sound.

But at this moment a maid appeared with the announcement that "Macpherson was wanting to see the Colonel," and presently the head stalker arrived in what John Bunyan calls a "pelting heat." Generally of a pale complexion which never tanned, he was now as red as a peony, and his grey beard made a startling contrast with his flamboyant face. Usually he was an embarrassed figure inside the Castle, having difficulties in disposing of his arms and legs, but now excitement made him bold.

"I've seen him, Cornel," he panted. "Seen him crawlin' like an adder and runnin' like a sta-ag!"

"Seen who? Get your breath, Macpherson?"

"Him—the man—Macnab. I beg your pardon for my pechin', sir, but I came down the hill like I

was a rollin' stone. . . . It was up on the backside of Craig Dhu near the old sheep-fauld. I seen a man hunkerin' among the muckle stones, and I got my glass on him, and he was a sma' man that I've never seen afore. I was wild to get a grip of him, and I started runnin' to drive him to the Cailleach's Well, where Miss Agatha and the gentleman was havin' their lunch. He seen me, and he took the road I ettled, and I thought I had him, for, thinks I, the young gentleman is soople and lang in the leg. But he seen the danger and turned off down the burn, and I couldna come near him. It would have been all right if I could have made the young gentleman hear, but though I was roarin' like a stot he was deafer than a tree. Och, it is the great peety."

"Agatha, what on earth were you doing?" Janet asked severely.

Junius Bandicott blushed hotly. "I never heard a sound," he said. "There must be something funny about the acoustics of that place."

Colonel Raden, who knew the power of his stalker's lungs, looked in a mystified way from one to the other.

"Didn't you see Macpherson, Agatha?" he asked. "He must have been in view coming over the shoulder of Craig Dhu."

It was Agatha's turn to blush, which she did with vigour, and, to Mr. Bandicott's eyes, with remarkable grace.

"Ach, I was in view well enough," went on the tactless Macpherson, "and I was routin' like a wild beast. But the twa of them was that busy talking they never lifted their eyes, and the man, as I tell

you, slippit off down the burn. It is a gre-at peety, whatever."

"What did you do then?" the Colonel demanded.

"I followed him till I lost him in that awful rough corrie. . . . But I seen him again—aye, I seen him again, away over on the Maam above the big wud. Standin', as impident as ye please, on the sky-line."

"How long after you lost him in the corrie?" Janet asked.

"Maybe half an hour."

"Impossible," she said sharply. "No living man could cover three miles of that ground in half an hour."

"I was thinkin' the body was the Deevil."

"You saw a second man. John Macnab has an accomplice."

Macpherson scratched his shaggy head. "I wouldn't say but ye're right, Miss Janet. Now I think of it, it was a bigger man. He didn't bide a moment after I caught sight of him, but I got my glass on him, and he was a bigger man. Aye, a bigger man, and, maybe, a younger man."

"This is very disturbing," said Colonel Raden, walking to the window and twisting his moustache. "What do you make of it, Nettie?"

"I think the affair is proceeding, as generals say about their battles, 'according to plan.' We didn't know before that John Macnab had a confederate, but of course he was bound to have one. There was nothing against it in the terms of the wager."

"Of course not, of course not. But what the

devil was he doing on Carnbeg? There was no shot, Macpherson?"

"There was no shot, and there will be no shot. There was no beasts the side they were on, and Alan is up there now with one of James's laddies."

"It's exactly what we expected," said Janet. "It proves that we were right in guessing that John Macnab would take Carnmore. He came here to-day to frighten us about Carnbeg—make us think that he was going to try there, and get us to mass our forces. To-morrow he'll be on Carnmore, and then he'll mean business. I hoped this would happen, and I was getting nervous when Agatha and Mr. Bandicott came home looking as blank as the Babes in the Wood. But I wish I knew which was really John Macnab—the little one or the tall one."

"What does that matter?" her parent asked.

"Because I should be happier if he were tall. Little men are far more cunning."

Junius Bandicott, having recovered his composure, chose to be amused. "I take that as a personal compliment, Miss Janet. I'm pretty big, and I can't say I want to be thought cunning."

"Then John Macnab will get his salmon," said Janet with decision.

Junius laughed. "You bet he won't. I've gotten the place watched like the Rum Fleet at home. A bird can't hardly cough without its being reported to me. My fellows are on to the game, and John Macnab will have to be a mighty clever citizen to come within a mile of the Strathlarrig water. Nobody is allowed to fish it but myself till the 3rd of September is past. I reckon

angling just now is the forbidden fruit of this neighbourhood. I've seen but the one fellow fishing in the last three days—on the bit of slack water five hundred yards below the bridge. It belongs to Crask, I think."

Janet nodded. "No good except with a worm after a spate. Crask has no fishing worth the name."

"I saw him from the automobile early this morning," Junius continued. "Strange sight he was, too—dressed in pyjamas and rubbers—flogging away at the most hopeless stretch you can imagine—dead calm, not a ripple. He had out about fifty yards of line, and when I passed he made a cast which fell with a flop about his ears. Who do you suppose he was? Somebody from Crask?"

Janet, who was the family's authority on Crask, agreed. "Probably some English servant who came down before breakfast just to say he had fished for salmon."

After tea Janet went down into the haugh. She met old Mr. Bandicott returning from the Piper's Ring, a very grubby old gentleman, and a little dashed in spirits, for he had as yet seen no sign of Harald Blacktooth's coffin. "Another day's work," he announced, "and then I win or lose. I thought I had struck it this afternoon, but it was the solid granite. If the fellow is there he's probably in a rift of the rock. That has been known to happen. The Vikings found a natural fissure, stuck their dead chief in it, and heaped earth above to make a barrow. . . ."

Down near the stream she met Benjie, who appeared to have worked late at his besoms, bumping

over the moor to the road. He and his old pony made a more idyllic picture than ever in the mellow light of evening, almost too conventionally artistic to be real, she thought, till Benjie's immobile figure woke to life at the sight of her and he pulled his lint-white forelock. "A grand nicht, lady," he crooned, and jogged on into the beeches' shade. . . . She sat on the bridge and watched the Raden waters pass from gold to amethyst and from amethyst to purple, and then sauntered back through the sweet-smelling dusk. Visions of John Macnab filled her mind, now a tall bravo with a colonial accent, now a gnarled Caliban of infinite cunning and gnome-like agility. Where in this haunted land was he ensconced—in some hazel covert, or in some clachan but-and-ben, or miles distant in a populous hotel, ready to speed in a swift car to the scene of action? . . . Anyhow, in twenty-four hours she would know if she had defeated this insolent challenger. On the eve of battle she had forgotten all about the stakes and her new hunter; it was the honour of Glenraden that was concerned, that little stone castle against the world.

Night fell, cool and cloudless, and the gillies went on their patrols. Carnmore was their only beat, and they returned one at a time to snatch a few hours' rest. At dawn they went out again—with the Colonel, but without Alan, who was to follow after he had had his ration of sleep. It was arranged that the two girls and Junius Bandicott should spend the day on Carnbeg by way of extra precaution, though if a desperate man made the assault there it was not likely that Junius, who

knew nothing of deer and had no hill-craft, would be able to stop him.

Janet woke in low spirits, and her depression increased as the morning advanced. She was full of vague forebodings, and of an irritable unrest to which her steady nerves had hitherto been a stranger. She wished she were a man and could be now on Carnmore, for Carnbeg, she was convinced, was out of danger. Junius, splendid in buckskin breeches and a russet sweater, she regarded with disfavour; he was a striking figure, but out of keeping with the hills, the obvious amateur, and she longed for the halting and guileful Sir Archie. Nor was her temper improved by the conduct of her companions. Agatha and Junius seemed to have an inordinate amount to say to each other, and their conversation was idiotic to the ears of a third party. Their eyes were far more on each other than on the landscape, and their telescopes were never in use. But it mattered little, for Carnbeg slept in a primordial peace. Only pipits broke the silence, only a circling merlin made movement in a spell-bound world. There were some hinds on the west side of Craig Dhu, but no stag showed—as was natural, the girl reflected, for in this weather and thus early in the season the stags would be on the highest tops. John Macnab had chosen rightly if he wanted a shot, but there were three gillies and her father to prevent him getting his beast away.

At luncheon, which was eaten by the Cailleach's Well, Junius took to quoting poetry and Agatha to telling, very charmingly, the fairy tales of the glens. To Janet it all seemed wrong; this was not an

occasion for literary philandering, when the credit of Glenraden was at stake. But even she was forced to confess that nothing was astir in the mossy wilderness. She climbed to the top of Craig Dhu and had a long spy, but, except for more hinds and one small knobber, living thing there was none. As the afternoon drew on, she drifted away from the two, who, being engrossed with each other, did not notice her departure.

She wandered through the deep heather of the Maam to where the great woods began that dipped to the Raden glen. It was pleasant walking in the cool shade of the pines on turf which was half thyme and milkwort and eyebright, and presently her spirits rose. Now and then, on some knuckle of blaeberry-covered rock which rose above the trees, she would halt, and, stretched at full length, would spy the nooks of the Home beat. There was no lack of deer there. She picked up one group and then another in the aisles and clearings of the woods, and there were shootable stags among them.

A report like a rifle-shot suddenly startled her. Then she remembered old Mr. Bandicott down in the haugh, and, turning her glance in that direction, saw a thin cloud of blue smoke floating away from the Piper's Ring.

Slowly she worked her way down-hill, aiming at the haugh about a mile upstream from the excavators. Once a startled hind and calf sprang up from her feet, and once an old fox slipped out of a pile of rocks and revived thoughts of Warwickshire and her problematical hunter. Soon she was not more than three hundred feet above the stream level, and

found a bracken-clad hillock where she could lie and watch the scene. There was a roebuck feeding just below her, a roebuck with fine horns, and it amused her to see the beast come nearer and nearer since the wind was behind him. He got within five yards of the girl, who lay mute as a stone ; then some impulse made him look up and meet her eye, and in a second he had streaked into cover.

Amid that delicious weather and in that home of peace Janet began to recapture her usual mirthfulness. She had been right ; Carnmore was the place John Macnab would select, unless his heart had failed him, and on Carnmore he would get a warm reception. There was no need to worry any longer about John Macnab. . . . Her thoughts went back to Agatha. Clearly Junius Bandicott was in love with her, and probably she would soon be in love with Junius Bandicott. No one could call it anything but a most suitable match, but Janet was vaguely unhappy about it, for it meant a break in their tiny household and the end of a long and affectionate, if occasionally tempestuous, comradeship. She would be very lonely at Glenraden without Agatha, and what would Agatha do when transplanted to a foreign shore—Agatha, for whom the world was bounded by her native hills ? She began to figure to herself what America was like, and, as her pictures had no basis of knowledge, they soon became fantastic, and merged into dreams. The drowsy afternoon world laid its spell upon the girl, and she fell asleep.

She awoke half an hour later with the sound of a shot in her ear. It set her scrambling to her feet till she remembered the excavators at the Piper's

Ring, who were out of the sight of the knoll on which she stood, somewhat on her right rear. Reassured, she lazily scanned the sleeping haugh, with the glittering Raden in the middle distance, and beyond the wooded slopes of the other side of the glen. She noticed a small troop of deer splashing through the shallows. Had they been scared by Mr. Bandicott's explosion? That was odd, for the report had been faint and they were up-wind from it.

They were badly startled, for they raced through the river and disappeared in a few breathless seconds in the farther woods. . . . Suddenly a thought made her heart beat wildly, and she raked the ground with her glass. . . .

There was something tawny on a patch of turf in a little hollow near the stream. A moment of anxious spying showed her that it was a dead stag. The report had not been Mr. Bandicott's dynamite but a rifle.

Down the hill-side like a startled hind went Janet. She was choking with excitement, and had no clear idea in her head except a determination that John Macnab should not lay hand on the stricken beast. If he had pierced their defences, and got his shot, he would at any rate not get the carcass off the ground. No thought of the stakes and her hunter occurred to her—only of Glenraden and its inviolate honour.

Almost at once she lost sight of the place where the stag lay. She was now on the low ground of the haugh, in a wilderness of bogs and hollows and overgrown boulders, with half a mile of rough country between her and her goal. Soon she was

panting hard : presently she had a stitch in her side : her eyes dimmed with fatigue, and her hat flew off and was left behind. It was abominable ground for speed, for there were heather-roots to trip the foot, and mires to engulf it, and noxious stones over which a runner must go warily or break an ankle. On with bursting heart went Janet, slipping, floundering, more than once taking wild tosses. Her light shoes grew leaden, her thin skirts a vast entangling quilt ; her side ached and her legs were fast numbing. . . . Then, from a slight rise, she had a glimpse of the Raden water, now very near, and the sight of a moving head. Her speed redoubled, and miraculously her aches ceased—the fire of battle filled her, as it had burned in her progenitors when they descended on their foes through the moonlit passes.

Suddenly she was at the scene of the dark deed. There lay the dead stag, and beside it a tall man with his shirt-sleeves turned up and a knife in his hand. That the miscreant should be calmly proceeding to the gralloch was like a fiery stimulant to Janet's spirit. Gone was every vestige of fatigue, and she descended the last slope like a mænad.

“ Stop ! ” she sobbed. “ Stop, you villain ! ”

The man started at her voice, and drew himself up. He saw a slim dishevelled girl, hatless, her fair locks fast coming down, who, in the attitude of a tragedy queen, stood with uplifted and accusing hand. She saw a tall man, apparently young, with a very ruddy face, a thatch of sandy hair, and ancient, disreputable clothes.

“ You are beaten, John Macnab,” cried the

panting voice. "I forbid you to touch that stag. I . . ."

The man seemed to have grasped the situation, for he shut the knife and slipped it back in his pocket. Also he smiled. Also he held both hands above his head.

"*Kamarad!*" he said. "I acknowledge defeat, Miss Raden."

Then he picked up his rifle and his discarded jacket, and turned and ran for it. She heard him splashing through the river, and in three minutes he was swallowed up in the farther woods.

The victorious Janet sank gasping on the turf. She wanted to cry, but changed her mind and began to laugh hysterically. After that she wanted to sing. She and she alone had defeated the marauder, while every man about the place was roosting idly on Carnmore. Now at last she remembered that hunter which would carry her in the winter over the Midland pastures. That was good, but to have beaten John Macnab was better. . . . And then just a shade of compunction tempered her triumph. She had greatly liked the look of John Macnab. He was a gentleman—his voice bore witness to the fact, and the way he had behaved. *Kamarad!* He must have fought in the war and had no doubt done well. Also, he was beyond question a sportsman. The stag was just the kind of beast that a sportsman would kill—a switch horn, going back in condition—and he had picked him out of a herd of better beasts. The shot was a workmanlike one—through the neck. . . . And the audacity of him! His wits had beaten them all, for he had chosen the Home beat which everyone

had dismissed as inviolable. Truly a foeman worthy of her steel, whom like all good fighters after victory she was disposed to love.

Crouched beside the dead stag, she slowly recovered her breath. What was the next move to be? If she left the beast might not John Macnab return and make off with it? No, he wouldn't. He was a gentleman, and would not go back on his admission of defeat. But she was anxious to drain the last drops of her cup of triumph, to confront the idle garrison of Carnmore on its return with the tangible proof of her victory. The stag should be lying at the Castle door, and she herself waiting beside it to tell her tale. She might borrow Mr. Bandicott's men to move it.

Hastily doing up her hair, she climbed out of the hollow to the little ridge which gave a prospect over the haugh. There before her, not a hundred yards distant, was the old cart and the white pony of Fish Benjie, looking as if it had been part of the landscape since the beginning of time.

Benjie had wormed his way far into the moss, for he was more than half a mile from the road. It appeared that he had finished his day's work on the besoms, for his pony was in the shafts, and he himself was busy loading the cart with the fruits of his toil. She called out to him, but got no reply, and it was not till she stood beside him that he looked up from his work.

"Benjie," she said, "come at once. I want you to help me. Have you been here long?"

"Since nine this mornin', lady." Benjie's face was as impassive as a stump of oak.

"Didn't you hear a shot?"

"I heard a gude wheen shots. The auld man up at the Piper's Ring has been blastin' awa."

"But close to you? Didn't you see a man—not five minutes ago?"

"Aye. I seen a man. I seen him crossin' the water. I thought he was a gentleman from the Castle. He had a gun wi' him."

"It was a poacher, Benjie," said Janet dramatically. "The poacher I wanted you to look out for. He has killed a stag, too, but I drove him away. You must help me to get the beast home. Can you get your cart over that knowe?"

"Fine, lady."

Without more words Benjie took the reins and started the old pony. The cart floundered a little in a wet patch, tittuped over the tussocks, and descended with many jolts to the neighbourhood of the stag—Janet dancing in front of it like an Israelitish priest before the Ark of the Covenant.

The late afternoon was very hot, for down in the haugh the wind had died away. The stag weighed not less than fifteen stone, and before they finished Janet would have called them tons. Yet the great task of transhipment was accomplished. The pony was taken out of the shafts and the cart tilted, and, after some strenuous minutes, the carcase was heaved and pushed and levered on to its floor. Janet, hanging on to the shafts, with incredible exertions pulled them down, while Benjie—a tiny Atlas—prevented the beast slipping back by bearing its weight on his shoulders. The back-board was put in its place, the mass of brooms and heather piled on the stag, the pony restored to the shafts, and the cortège was ready for the road.

Benjie had his face adorned with a new scratch and a quantity of deer's blood, Janet had nobly torn her jumper and one stocking; but these were trivial casualties for so great an action.

"Drive straight to the Castle and tell them to leave the beast before the door. You understand, Benjie? Before the door—not in the larder. I'm going to strike home through the woods, for I'm an awful sight."

"Ye look very bonny, lady," said the gallant Benjie as he took up the reins.

Janet watched the strange outfit lumber from the hollow and nearly upset over a hidden boulder. It had the appearance of a moving peat-stack, with a solitary horn jutting heavenwards like a withered branch. Once again the girl subsided on the heather and laughed till she ached.

The highway by the Larrig side slept in the golden afternoon. Not a conveyance had disturbed its peace save the baker's cart from Inverlarrig, which had passed about three o'clock. About half past five a man crossed it—a man who had descended from the hill and used the stepping-stones where Sir Archibald Roylance had come to grief. He was a tall man with a rifle, hatless, untidy, and very warm, and he seemed to desire to be unobserved, for he made certain that the road was clear before he ventured on it. Once across, he found shelter in a clump of broom, whence he could command a long stretch of the highway, almost from Glenraden gates to the Bridge of Larrig.

Mr. Palliser-Yeates, having reached sanctuary—

for behind him lay the broken hillsides of Crask—mopped his brow and lit a pipe. He did not seem to be greatly distressed at the result of the afternoon. Indeed, he laughed—not wildly like Janet, but quietly and with philosophy. “A very neat hold-up,” he reflected. “Gad, she came on like a small destroying angel. . . . That’s the girl Archie’s been talking about . . . a very good girl. She looked as if she’d have taken on an army corps. . . . I suppose that was the right way for the thing to end. . . . Jolly romantic ending—might have come out of a novel. Only it should have been Archie, and a prospect of wedding bells—what? . . . Anyhow, we’d have won out all right but for the girl, and I don’t mind being beaten by her. . . .”

His meditations were interrupted by the sound of furious wheels on the lone highway, and he cautiously raised his head to see an old horse and an older cart being urged towards him at a canter. The charioteer was a small boy, and above the cart sides projected a stag’s horn.

Forgetting all precautions, he stood up, and at the sight of him Benjie, not without difficulty, checked the ardour of his much-belaboured beast, and stopped before him.

“I’ve gotten it,” he whispered hoarsely. “The stag’s in the cairt. The lassie and me histed him in, and she tell’t me to drive to the Castle. But when I was out o’ sight o’ her, I took the auld road through the wud and here I am. We’ve gotten the stag off Glenraden ground and we can hide him up at Crask, and I’ll slip down in the cairt afore mornin’ and leave him ootbye the Castle wi’ a letter from John Macnab. Fegs, it was a near thing!”

Benjie's voice rose into a shrill paeon, his disreputable face shone with unholy joy. And then something in Palliser-Yeates's eyes cut short his triumph.

"Benjie, you little fool, right about turn at once. I'm much obliged to you, but it can't be done. It isn't the game, you know. I chucked up the sponge when Miss Raden challenged me, and I can't go back on that. Back you go to Glenraden and hand over the stag. Quick, before you're missed. . . . And look here—you're a first-class sportsman, and I'm enormously grateful to you. Here is something for your trouble."

Benjie's face grew very red as he swung his equipage round. "I see," he said. "If ye like to be beat by a lassie, dinna blame me. I'm no wantin' your money."

The next moment the fish-cart was clattering in the other direction.

To a mystified and anxious girl, pacing the gravel in front of the Castle, entered the fish-cart. The old horse seemed in the last stages of exhaustion, and the boy who drove it was a dejected and sparrow-like figure.

"Where in the world have you been?" Janet demanded.

"I was run awa wi', lady," Benjie whined. "The auld powny didna like the smell o' the stag. He bolted in the wud, and I didna get him stoppit till verra near the Larrig Bridge."

"Poor little Benjie! Now you're going to Mrs. Fraser to have the best tea you ever had in your life, and you shall also have ten shillings."

"Thank you kindly, lady, but I canna stop for

tea. I maun awa down to Inverlarrig for my fish." But his hand closed readily on the note, for he had no compunction in taking money from one who had made him to bear the bitterness of incomprehensible defeat.

XXXIV : THE RETURN OF HARALD BLACKTOOTH

MISS JANET RADEN had a taste for the dramatic, which that night was nobly gratified. The space in front of the great door of the Castle became a stage of which the sole furniture was a deceased stag, but on which event succeeded event with a speed which recalled the cinema rather than the legitimate drama.

First about six o'clock, entered Agatha and Junius Bandicott from their casual wardenship of Carnbeg. The effect upon the young man was surprising. Hitherto he had only half believed in John Macnab, and had regarded the defence of Glenraden as more or less of a joke. It seemed to him inconceivable that, even with the slender staffing of the forest, one man could enter and slay and recover a deer. But when he heard Janet's tale he became visibly excited, and his careful and precise English, the bequest of his New England birth, broke down into college slang.

"The man's a crackerjack," he murmured reverentially. "He has us all rocketing around the mountain tops, and then takes advantage of my dad's blasting operations and raids the front yard. He can pull the slick stuff all right, and we at Strathlarrig had better get cold towels round our

heads and do some thinking. Our time's getting short, too, for he starts at midnight the day after to-morrow. . . . What did you say the fellow was like, Miss Janet? Young, and big, and behaved like a gentleman? It's a tougher proposition than I thought, and I'm going home right now to put old Angus through his paces."

With a deeply preoccupied face Junius, declining tea, fetched his car from the stableyard and took his leave.

At seven-fifteen Colonel Raden, bestriding a deer pony, emerged from the beech avenue, and waved a cheerful hand to his daughters.

"It's all right, my dears. Not a sign of the blackguard. The men will remain on Carnmore till midnight to be perfectly safe, but I'm inclined to think that the whole thing is a fiasco. He has been frightened away by our precautions. But it's been a jolly day on the high tops, and I have the thirst of all creation."

Then his eye fell on the stag. "God bless my soul," he cried, "what is that?"

"That," said Janet, "is the stag which John Macnab killed this afternoon."

The Colonel promptly fell off his pony.

"Where—where?" he stammered.

"On the Home beat," said Janet calmly. The situation was going to be quite as dramatic as she had hoped. "I saw it fall, and ran hard and got up to it just when he was starting the gralloch. He was really quite nice about it."

"What did he do?" her parent demanded.

"He held up his hands and laughed and cried '*Kamerad!*' Then he ran away."

"The scoundrel showed a proper sense of shame."

"I don't think he was ashamed. Why should he be, for we accepted his challenge. You know, he's a gentleman, papa, and quite young and good looking."

Colonel Raden's mind was passing through swift stages from exasperation to unwilling respect. It was an infernal annoyance that John Macnab should have been suffered to intrude on the sacred soil of Glenraden, but the man had played the boldest kind of hand, and he had certainly not tailored his beast. Besides, he had been beaten—beaten by a girl, a daughter of the house. The honour of Glenraden might be considered sacrosanct after all.

A long drink restored the Colonel's equanimity, and the thought of their careful preparations expended in the void moved him to laughter.

"'Pon my word, Nettie, I should like to ask the fellow to dinner. I wonder where on earth he is living. He can't be far off, for he is due at Strathlarrig very soon. When did young Bandicott say the day was?"

"Midnight, the day after to-morrow. Mr. Junius feels very solemn after to-day, and has hurried home to put his house in order."

"Nettie," said the Colonel gravely. "I am prepared to make a modest bet that John Macnab gets his salmon. Hang it all, if he could outwit us—and he did it, confound him—he is bound to outwit the Bandicotts. I tell you what, John Macnab is a very remarkable man—a man in a million, and I'm very much inclined to wish him success."

"So am I," said Janet; but Agatha announced indignantly that she had never met a case of grosser selfishness. She announced, too, that she was prepared to join in the guarding of Strathlarrig.

"If you and Junius are no more use than you were on Carnbeg to-day, John Macnab needn't worry," said Janet sweetly.

Agatha was about to retort when there was a sudden diversion. The elder Bandicott appeared at a pace which was almost a run, breathing hard, and with all the appearance of strong excitement. Fifty yards behind him could be seen the two Strathlarrig labourers, making the best speed they could under the burden of heavy sacks. Mr. Bandicott had no breath left to speak, but he motioned to his audience to give him time and permit his henchmen to arrive. These henchmen he directed to the lawn, where they dropped their sacks on the grass. Then, with an air which was almost sacramental, he turned to Colonel Raden.

"Sir," he said, "you are privileged—*we* are privileged—to assist in the greatest triumph of modern archæology. I have found the coffin of Harald Blacktooth with the dust of Harald Blacktooth inside it."

"The devil you have!" said the Colonel. "I suppose I ought to congratulate you, but I'm bound to say I'm rather sorry. I feel as if I had violated the tomb of my ancestors."

"You need have no fear, sir. The dust has been reverently restored to its casket, and to-morrow the Piper's Ring will show no trace of the work. But within the stone casket there were articles

which, in the name of science, I have taken the liberty to bring with me, and which will awake an interest among the learned not less, I am convinced, than Schliemann's discoveries at Mycenæ. I have found, sir, incredible treasures."

"Treasures!" cried all three of his auditors, for the word has not lost its ancient magic.

Mr. Bandicott, with the air of one addressing the Smithsonian Institution, signalled to his henchmen, who thereupon emptied the sacks on the lawn. A curious jumble of objects lay scattered under the evening sun—two massive torques, several bowls and flagons, spear-heads from which the hafts had long since rotted, a sword-blade, and a quantity of brooches, armlets, and rings. A dingy enough collection they made to the eyes of the onlookers as Mr. Bandicott arranged them in two heaps.

"These," he said, pointing to the torques, armlets, and flagons, "are, so far as I can judge, of solid gold."

The Colonel called upon his Maker to sanctify his soul. "Gold! These great things! They must be prodigiously valuable. Are they mine, or yours, or whose?"

"I am not familiar with the law of Scotland on the matter of treasure-trove, but I assume that the State can annex them, paying you a percentage of their value. For myself, I gladly waive all claims. I am a man of science, sir, not a treasure-hunter. . . . But the merit of the discovery does not lie in those objects which can be paralleled, from many tombs in Scotland and Norway. No, sir, the tremendous, the epoch-making value is to

be found in these." And he indicated some bracelets and a necklace which looked as if they were made of queerly-marked and very dirty shells.

Mr. Bandicott lifted one and fingered it lovingly.

"I have found such objects in graves as far apart as the coast of Labrador and the coast of Rhode Island, and as far inland as the Ohio basin. These shells were the common funerary adjunct of the primitive inhabitants of my country, and they are peculiar to the North American continent. Do you see what follows, sir?"

The Colonel did not, and Mr. Bandicott, his voice thrilling with emotion, continued:

"It follows that Harald Blacktooth obtained them from the only place he could obtain them, the other side of the Atlantic. There is historical warrant for believing that he voyaged to Greenland; and now we know that he landed upon the main North American continent. The legends of Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky are verified by archæology. In you, sir, I salute, most reverently salute, the representative of a family to whom belongs the credit hitherto given to Columbus."

Colonel Raden plucked feebly at his moustache, and Janet, I regret to say, laughed. But her untimely merriment was checked by Mr. Bandicott, who was pronouncing a sort of benediction.

"I rejoice that it has been given to me, an American, to solve this secular riddle. When I think that the dust which an hour ago I touched, and which has lain for centuries under that quiet mound, was once the man who, first of Europeans, trod our soil, my imagination staggers. Colonel

Raden, I thank you for having given me the greatest moment of my not uneventful life."

He took off his hat, and the Colonel rather shamefacedly removed his. The two men stood looking solemnly at each other till practical considerations occurred to the descendant of the Viking.

"What are you going to do with the loot?" he asked.

"With your permission, I will take it to Strathlarrig, where I can examine and catalogue it at my leisure. I propose to announce the find at once to the world. To-morrow I will return with my men and remove the traces of our excavation."

Mr. Bandicott departed in his car, sitting erect at the wheel in a strangely priest-like attitude, while the two men guarded the treasure behind. He had no eyes for the twilight landscape, or he would have seen in the canal-like stretch of the Larrig belonging to Crask, which lay below the rapids and was universally condemned as hopeless for fish, a solitary angler, who, as the car passed, made a most bungling amateurish cast, but who, when the coast was once more clear, flung a line of surprising delicacy. He could not see the curious way in which that angler placed his fly, laying it with a curl a yard above a moving fish, floating it dry till after it had passed the fish, and then sinking it with a dexterous twist: nor did he see, a quarter of an hour later, the same angler land a fair salmon from water in which in the memory of man no salmon had ever been taken before.

Colonel Raden and his daughters stood watching the departing archæologist, and as his car vanished

among the beeches Janet seized her sister and whirled her into a dance. "Such a day," she cried, when the indignant Agatha had escaped and was patting her disordered hair. "Losses—one stag, which was better dead. Gains—defeat of John Macnab, fifty pounds sterling, a share of unknown value in Harald Blacktooth's treasure, and the annexation of America by the Raden family."

"You'd better say that America has annexed us," said the still flustered Agatha. "They've dug up our barrow, and this afternoon Junius Bandicott asked me to marry him."

Janet stopped in her tracks. "What did you say?"

"I said 'No' of course. I've only known him a week." But her tone was such as to make her sister fear the worst.

Mr. Bandicott was an archæologist, but he was also a business man, and he was disposed to use the whole apparatus of civilisation to announce his discovery to the world. With a good deal of trouble he got the two chief Scottish newspapers on the telephone, and dictated to them a summary of his story. He asked them to pass the matter on to the London Press, and he gave them ample references to establish his good faith. Also he prepared a sheaf of telegrams and cables—to learned societies in Britain and America, to the great New York daily of which he was the principal owner, to the British Museum, to the Secretary for Scotland, and to friends in the same line of scholarship. Having left instructions that these messages should be despatched from Inverlarrig at dawn, he went to bed

in a state of profound jubilation and utter fatigue.

Next morning, while his father was absorbed in the remains of Harald Blacktooth, Junius summoned a council of war. To it there came Angus, the head-keeper, a morose old man nearly six-foot-four in height, clean-shaven, with eyebrows like a pent-house; Lennox, his second-in-command, whom Leithen had met on his reconnaissance; and two youthful watchers, late of Lovat's Scouts, known as Jimsie and Davie. There were others about the place who could be mobilised if necessary, including the two chauffeurs, an under-footman and a valet; but, as Junius looked at his formidable quartet, and reflected on the narrow limits of the area of danger, he concluded that he had all the man-power he needed.

"Now, listen to me, Angus," he began. "This poacher Macnab proposes to start in to-morrow night at twelve o'clock, and according to his challenge he has forty-eight hours to get a fish in—up till midnight on the 3rd of September. I want your advice about the best way of checkmating him. You've attended to my orders, and let nobody near the river during the past week?"

"Aye, sir, and there's nobody socht to gang near it," said Angus. "The country-side has been as quiet as a grave."

"Well, it won't be after to-morrow night. You've probably heard that this Macnab killed a stag on Glenraden yesterday—killed it within half a mile of the house, and would have got away with it but for the younger Miss Raden."

They had heard of it, for the glen had talked of nothing else all night, but they thought it good

manners to express amazement. "Heard ye ever the like?" said one. "Macnab maun be a fair deevil," said another. "If I had just a grip of him," sighed the bloodthirsty Angus.

"It's clear we're up against something quite out of the common," Junius went on, "and we daren't give him the faintest outside chance. Now, let's consider the river. You say you've seen nobody near it."

"There hasn't been a line cast in the watter for-by your own, sir," said Angus.

"I just seen the one man fishin' all week," volunteered Jimsie. "It was on the Crask water below the brig. I jaloused that he was one of the servants from Crask, and maybe no very right in the heid. He had no notion of it at all, at all."

"Well, that's so far good. Now what about the river outside the park? Our beat runs from the Larrig Bridge—what's it like between the bridge and the lodge? You've never taken me fishing there."

"Ye wad need to be dementit before you went fishin' there," said Angus grimly. "There's the stretch above the brig that they ca' the Lang Whang. There was never man killed a saumon in it, for the fish dinna bide, but rin through to the Wood Pule. There's fish in the Wood Pule, but the trees are that thick that ye canna cast a flee. Though I'll no say," he added meditatively, "that ye couldna cleek a fish out of it. I'd better put a watcher at the Wood Pule."

"You may rule that out, for the bargain says 'legitimate means,' and from all I know of Macnab he's a sportsman and keeps his word. Well, then,

we come to the park, where we've the five pools—the Duke's, the Black Scour, Davie's Pot, Lady Maisie's, and the Minister's. We've got to keep our eyes skinned there. . . . What about the upper water? "

"There's no a fish in it," said Lennox. "They canna get past the linn above the Minister's. There was aye talk o' makin' a salmon ladder, but naething was done, and there's nocht above the Minister's but small broon troot."

"That makes it a pretty simple proposition," said Junius. "We've just the five pools to guard. For the form of the thing we'll keep watchers on all night, but we may take it that the danger lies only in the thirty-four hours of daylight. Now, remember, we're taking no chances. Not a soul is to be allowed to fish on the Strathlarrig water till after midnight on the 3rd of September. Not even I or my father. Macnab's a foxy fellow and I wouldn't put it past him to disguise himself as Mr. Bandicott or myself. Do you understand? If you see a man near the river, kick him out. If he has a rod in his hand, lock him up in the garage and send for me. . . . No, better still. Nobody's to be allowed inside the gates—except Colonel Raden and his daughters. You'd better tell the lodge-keeper, Angus. If anybody comes to call, they must come back another day. These are my orders, you understand, and I fire anyone who disobeys them. If the 3rd of September passes without accident there's twenty dollars—I mean to say, five pounds—for each of you. That's all I've got to say."

"Will we watch below the park, sir? " Angus asked.

"Watch every damned foot of the water from the bridge to the linns."

Thus it came about that when Janet Raden took her afternoon ride past the Wood of Larrigmore she beheld a man patrolling the bog like a policeman on point duty, and when she entered the park for a gallop on the smooth turf she observed a picket at each pool. "Poor John Macnab!" she sighed. "He hasn't the ghost of a chance. I'm rather sorry my family ever discovered America."

Next day, the 1st of September, the Scottish Press published a short account of Mr. Bandicott's discovery, and *The Scotsman* had a leader on it. About noon a spate of telegrams began, and the girl who carried them on a bicycle from Inverlarrig had a weary time of it. The following morning the Press of Britain spread themselves on the subject. *The Times* had a leader and an interview with a high authority at the British Museum; *The Daily Mail* had a portrait of Mr. Bandicott and a sketch of his past career, a photograph of what purported to be a Viking's tomb in Norway, and a chatty article on the law of treasure-trove. *The Morning Post* congratulated the discoverer in the name of science, but lamented in the name of patriotism that the honour should have fallen to an alien—views which led to an interminable controversy in its pages with the secretary of the Pilgrims' Club and the president of the American Chamber of Commerce. The evening papers had brightly written articles on Strathlarrig, touching on the sport of deer-stalking, Celtic mysticism, the crofter question, and the law dealing with access to mountains.

The previous evening, too, the special correspondents had begun to arrive from all points of the compass, so that the little inn of Inverlarrig had people sleeping in its one bathroom and under its dining-room table. By the morning of the 2nd of September the glen had almost doubled its male population.

The morning, after some rain in the night, broke in the thin fog which promised a day of blazing heat. Sir Edward Leithen, taking the air after breakfast, decided that his attempt should be made in the evening, for he wanted the Larrig waters well warmed by the sun for the type of fishing he proposed to follow. Benjie had faithfully reported to him the precautions which the Bandicotts had adopted, and his meditations were not cheerful. With luck he might get a fish, but only by a miracle could he escape unobserved. His plan depended upon the Lang Whang being neglected by the watchers as not worthy of their vigilance, but according to Benjie's account even the Lang Whang had become a promenade. He had now lost any half-heartedness in the business, and his obstinate soul was as set on victory as ever it had been in a case in the Law Courts. For the past four days he had thought of nothing else, his interest in Palliser-Yeates's attack on Glenraden had been notably fainter than that of the others, every energy he had of mind and body was centred upon killing a fish that night and carrying it off. With some amusement he reflected that he had dissipated the last atom of his ennui, and he almost regretted that apathy had been exchanged for this violent preoccupation.

Presently he turned his steps to the harbour to the east of the garden, which forms at once a hiding-place and a watch-tower. There he found his host busied about the preparation of his speech, with the assistance of Lamancha, who was also engaged intermittently in the study of the Ordnance map of Haripol.

"It's a black look-out for you, Ned," said Sir Archie. "I hear the Bandicotts have taped off every yard of their water, and have got a man to every three. Benjie says the place only wants a piper or two to be like the Muirtown Highland Gathering. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to have a try this evening. I can't chuck in my hand, but the thing's a stark impossibility. I hoped old Bandicott would be so excited at unearthing the Viking that he would forget about precautions, but he's as active as a beaver."

"That's the young 'un. He don't give a damn for Vikings, but he's out to protect his fish. You've struck the American business mind, my lad, and it's an awful thing for us casual Britons. I suppose you won't let me come down and watch you. I'd give a lot to see a scrap between you and that troglodyte Angus."

At that moment Benjie, wearing the waterproof cape of ceremony, presented himself at the harbour door. He bore a letter which he presented to Sir Archie. The young man read it with a face which was at once perplexed and pleased.

"It's from old Bandicott. He says he has got some antiquarian swell—Professor Babwater I think the name is—coming to stay, and he wants me to dine to-night—says the Radens are coming

too. . . . This is the devil. What had I better do, Charles ? ”

“ Stay at home. You’ll put your foot in it somehow if you go. The girl who held up old John will be there, and she’s bound to talk about John Macnab, and you’re equally bound to give the show away.”

“ But I haven’t any sort of excuse. Americans are noted for their politeness, and here have I been shutting the door in the face of the poor old chap when he toiled up the hill. He won’t understand it, and people will begin to talk, and that’s the quickest way to blow the gaff. Besides, I’ve got to give up this lie about my ill-health if I’m to appear at Muirtown the day after to-morrow. What do *you* say, Ned ? ”

“ I think you’d better go,” Leithen answered. “ We can’t have the neighbourhood thinking you are plague-stricken. You’ll be drinking port, while I’m being carted by the gillies into the coal-hole. But for Heaven’s sake, Archie, go canny. That Raden girl will turn you inside out, if you give her a chance. And don’t you try and be clever, whatever happens. If there’s a row and you see me being frog-marched into captivity, don’t trouble to create a diversion. Behave as if you had never seen me in your life before. . . . You hadn’t heard of John Macnab except from Miss Raden, and you’re desperately keen to hear more, you understand. Play the guileless innocent and rack your brains to think who he can be. Start any hare you like—that he’s D’Annunzio looking for excitement . . . or the Poet Laureate . . . or an escaped lunatic. And keep it up that you are in delicate health. Oh,

and talk politics—they're safe enough. Babble about the Rally, and how the great Lamancha's coming up for it all the way from the Borders."

Archie nodded, with a contented look in his eyes. "I'm going to take your advice. Where did you get this note, Benjie? From Mactavish at the lodge? All right, I'll give you a line to take back with you. . . . By the way, Ned, what's your get-up to-night? I'd better know beforehand in case of accidents."

"I'm going to look the basest kind of poaching tramp. I've selected my costume from the combined wardrobes of this household, and I can tell you it's pretty dingy. Mrs. Lithgow is at present engaged in clouting the oldest pair of Wattie's breeks for me. . . . My only chance is to be a regular ragamuffin, and the worst I need fear then is a rough handling from the gillies. Bandicott, I take it, is not the sort of fellow to want to prosecute. If I'm caught—which is fairly certain—I'll probably get a drubbing and spend the night in a cellar and be given my breakfast next morning and kicked out. It's a different matter for you, Charles, with the legally minded Claybody."

"What odds are you offering?" Sir Archie asked. "John backed himself and I took a tenner off him. What about an even fiver?"

"I'll give you three to one in five-pound notes that I win," said Leithen grimly. "But that's pride, not conviction."

"Done with you, my lad," said Sir Archie, and departed to write an acceptance of the invitation to dinner.

Fish Benjie remained behind, and it was clear

that he had something to communicate. He caught Lamancha's eye, who gave him the opening he sought by asking what was the news from Strathlarrig. Benjie had the instinct of the ballad-maker, and would begin his longer discourses with an epic flourish of the "Late at e'en drinkin' the wine" style.

"It was at fower o'clock this mornin' they started," he announced, "and they're still comin'."

"Coming? Who?" Leithen asked.

"Jornalists. The place is crawlin' wi' them. I seen six on bicycles and five in cawrs and twa in the Inverlarrig dowie-cairt. They're a' wantin' to see auld Bandicott, but auld Bandicott will no see them. Mactavish stops them at the lodge, and speirs what they want, and they gie him cairds wi' their names prentit, and he sends them up to the hoose, but he'll no let them enter. Syne the message comes back that the maister will see them the day after the morn, but till then naebody maun put a fit inside the gates."

"What happens then?" Leithen asked with acute interest.

"It hasna happened—it's still happenin'! I never in my life heard sic a lot o' sweer words. Says ane, 'Does the auld dotterel think he can defy the British Press? We'll mak his life no worth leevin'.' Says another, 'I've come a' the gait frae London and I'll no budge till I've seen the banes o' that Viking!' One or twa went back to Inverlarrig, but the feck o' them just scattered like paitricks. They clamb the wall, and they waded up the water, and they got in by the top o' the linns. In half an hour there was half a dizzen o'

them inside the Strathlarrig policies. Man"—here he fixed his glowing eye on Leithen—"if ye had been on the Lang Whang this mornin' ye could have killed a fish and naebody the wiser."

"Good Lord! Are they there still?"

"Na. They were huntit oot. Every man aboot the place was huntin' them, and Angus was roarin' like a bull. The young Laird thocht they were Bolshies and cam doun wi' a gun. Syne the auld man appeared and spoke them fair and telled them he was terrible sorry, but he couldna see them for twa days, and if they contentit themselves that lang he would hae them a' to their denner and show them everything. After that they gaed awa, but there's aye mair arrivin' and I'm expectin' mair riots. They're forritsome lads, thae jornalists, and a dour crop to shift. But they're kind folk, and gie'd me a shillin' a-piece for advisin' them."

"What did you advise?"

"I advised them to gang doun to Glenraden," said Benjie with a goblin smile. "I said they should gang and howk in the Piper's Ring and they would maybe find mair treasure. Twa-three o' them got spades and picks and startit off. I'm thinkin' Macpherson will be after them wi' a whup."

Leithen's brows were puckered in thought. "It looks as if my bet with Archie wasn't so crazy after all. This invasion is bound to confuse Bandicott's plans. And you say it's still going on? The gillies will be weary men before night."

"They will that," Benjie assented. "And there's no a man o' them can rin worth a docken, except Jimsie. Thae jornalists was far soopler."

"More power to the Press. Benjie, back you go and keep an eye on Strathlarrig, and stir up the journalists to a sense of their rights. Report here this afternoon at four, for we should be on the move by six, and I've a lot to say to you."

In the course of the morning Leithen went for a walk among the scaurs and dingles of Crask hill. He followed a footpath which took him down the channel of a tiny burn, and led to a little mantel-piece of a meadow from which Wattie Lithgow drew a modest supply of bog-hay. His mind was so filled with his coming adventure that he walked with his head bent and at a turn of the path nearly collided with a man.

Murmuring a gruff "Fine day," he would have passed on, when he became aware that the stranger had halted. Then, to his consternation, he heard his name uttered, and had perforce to turn. He saw a young man, in knickerbockers and heavy nailed boots, who smiled diffidently as if uncertain whether he would be recognised.

"Sir Edward Leithen, isn't it?" he said. "I once had the pleasure of meeting you, sir, when you lunched with the Lobby journalists. I was then on the Lobby staff of the *Monitor*. My name is Crossby."

"Of course, of course. I remember perfectly. Let's sit down, Mr. Crossby, unless you're in a hurry. Where are you bound for?"

"Simply stretching my legs. I was climbing rocks at Sligachan when my paper wired me to come on here. The Press seem to have gone mad about this Viking's tomb—think they've got hold

of a second Tutankhamen. So I got a fisherman to take me and my bicycle over to the mainland and pedalled the rest of the road. I thought I had a graft with old Bandicott, for I used to write for his paper—*The New York Bulletin*, you know—but it appears there's nothing doing. Odd business, for you don't often find Americans shy of the Press. But I think I've found out the reason, and that makes a good enough story in itself. Perhaps you've heard it?"

"No," said Leithen, "but I'd like to, if you don't mind. I'm not a journalist, so I won't give you away. Let's have it."

He stole a glance at his companion, and saw a pleasant, shrewd boyish face, with the hard sun-burnt skin of one in the prime of physical condition. Like many others of his type, Leithen liked journalists as much as he disliked men of letters—the former had had their corners smoothed by a rough life, and lacked the vanity and spiritual pride of the latter. Also he had acquired from experience a profound belief in the honour of the profession, for at various times in his public career he had put his reputation into their hands and they had not failed him. It was his maxim that if you tried to bamboozle them they were out for your blood, but that if you trusted them they would see you through.

"Let's hear it, Mr. Crossby," he repeated. "I'm deeply interested."

"Well, it's a preposterous tale, but the natives seem to believe it. They say that some fellow, who calls himself John Macnab, has dared the magnates in these parts to prevent his killing a stag or a

salmon in their preserves. He has laid down pretty stiff conditions for himself, for he has to get his beast off their ground and hand it back to them. They say he has undertaken to pay £500 to any charity the owner names if he succeeds and £1,000 if he fails—so he must have money to burn, and it appears that he has already paid the £500. He started on Glenraden, and the old Highland chief there had every man and boy for three days watching the forest. Then on the third day, when everybody was on the mountain-tops, in sails John Macnab and kills a stag under the house windows. He reckoned on the American's dynamite charges in his search for the Viking to hide his shot. And he would have got away with it too, if one of the young ladies hadn't appeared on the scene and cried 'Desist!' So what does this bandit do but off with his hat, makes his best bow, and says 'Madame, your servant' and vanishes, leaving the chief richer by a thousand pounds. It's Bandicott's turn to-day and to-morrow, and the Strathlarrig household is squatting along the river banks, and the hard-working correspondent is chivvied away till the danger is past. I'm for Macnab myself. It warms my heart to think that there's such a sportsman left alive. It's pure Robin Hood."

Leithen laughed. "I back him too. Are you going to publish that story?"

"Yes, why not? I've written most of it and it goes by the afternoon post." Mr. Crossby pulled out a notebook and fluttered the leaves.

"I call it 'The Return of Harald Blacktooth.' Rather neat, I think. The idea is that when they

started to dig up the old fellow his spirit reincarnated itself in John Macnab. I hope to have a second instalment, for something's bound to happen at Strathlarrig to-day or to-morrow. Are you holidaying here, Sir Edward? Crask's the name of this place, isn't it? They told me that that mad fellow Roylance owned it."

Leithen nodded. He was bracing himself for another decision of the same kind as he had taken when he met Fish Benjie. Providence seemed to be forcing him to preserve his incognito only by sharing the secret.

"But, of course," Mr. Crossby went on, "my main business here is the Viking, and I'm keen to find some way to get over Bandicott's reticence. I don't want to wait till the day after to-morrow and then come in with the ruck. I wonder . . . would it be too much to ask you to give me a leg up? I expect you know the Bandicotts?"

"Unfortunately, I don't. I am not sure how far I can help you, Mr. Crossby, but I rather think you can help me. Are you by any happy chance a long-distance runner?"

The journalist opened his eyes. "Well, I used to be. South London Harriers, you know. And I'm in fairly good condition at present after ten days on the Coolin rocks."

"Well, if I can't give you a story, I think I can put you in the way of an adventure. Will you come up to Crask to luncheon and we'll talk it over?"

XXXV: THE OLD ETONIAN TRAMP

SIR ARCHIE got himself into the somewhat Sancier dress-coat which was the best he had at Crask, and about half-past seven started his Hispana (a car in which his friends would not venture with Archie as driver) down the long hill to the gates of Strathlarrig. He was aware that somewhere in the haugh above the bridge was Leithen, but the only figure visible was that of Jimsie, the Strathlarrig gillie, who was moodily prowling about the upper end. As he passed the Wood of Larrigmore Benjie's old pony was grazing at tether, and the old cart rested on its shafts; the embers of a fire still glowed among the pine-needles, but there was no sign of Benjie. He was admitted after a parley by Mactavish the lodge-keeper, and when he reached the door of the house he observed a large limousine being driven off to the back premises by a very smart chauffeur. Only Haripol was likely to own such a car, and Sir Archie reflected with amusement that the host of John Macnab was about to attend a full conclave of the Enemy.

The huge, ugly drawing-room looked almost beautiful in the yellow light of evening. A fire burned on the hearth after the fashion of Highland houses even in summer, and before it stood Mr. Acheson Bandicott, with a small clean-shaven man, who was obviously the distinguished Professor in whose honour the feast was given, and Colonel Raden, a picturesque figure in kilt and velvet doublet, who seemed hard put to it to follow what was clearly a technical colloquy. Agatha and

Junius were admiring the sunset in the west window, and Janet was talking to a blond young man who seemed possessed of a singularly penetrating voice.

Sir Archie was unknown to most of the company, and when his name was announced everyone except the Professor turned towards him with a lively curiosity. Old Mr. Bandicott was profuse in his welcome, Junius no less cordial, Colonel Raden approving, for indeed it was not in human nature to be cold towards so friendly a being as the Laird of Crask. Sir Archie was apologetic for his social misfeasances, congratulatory about Harald Blacktooth, eager to atone for the past by an exuberant neighbourliness. "Been having a rotten time with the toothache," he told his host. "I roost up alone in my little barrack and keep company with birds. . . . Bit of a naturalist, you know . . . Yes, sir, quite fit again, but my leg will never be much to boast of."

Colonel Raden appraised the lean, athletic figure. "You've been our mystery man, Sir Archibald. I'm almost sorry to meet you, for we lose our chief topic of discussion. You're fond of stalking they tell me. When are you coming to kill a stag at Glenraden?"

"When will you ask me?" Sir Archie laughed. "I'm still fairly good on the hill, but just now I'm sitting indoors all day tugging at my hair and trying to compose a speech."

Colonel Raden's face asked for explanations.

"Day after to-morrow in Muirtown. Big Unionist meeting and I've got to start the ball. It's jolly hard to know what to talk about, for I've

a pretty high average of ignorance about everything. But I've decided to have a shot at foreign policy. You see, Charles——" Sir Archie stopped in a fright. He had been within an ace of giving the show away.

"Of course. 'Pon my soul I had forgotten that you were our candidate. It's an uphill fight I'm afraid. The people in these parts, sir, are the most obstinate reactionaries on the face of the globe; but they've been voting Liberal ever since the days of John Knox."

Mr. Bandicott regarded Sir Archie with interest.

"So you're standing for Parliament," he said. "Few things impress me more in Great Britain than the way young men take up public life as if it were the natural coping-stone to their education. We have no such tradition, and we feel the absence of it. Junius would as soon think of running for Congress as of keeping a faro-saloon. Now I wonder, Sir Archibald, what induced you to take this step?"

But Sir Archie was gone, for he had seen the beckoning eyes of Janet Raden. That young woman, ever since she had heard that the Laird of Crask was coming to dinner, had looked forward to this occasion as her culminating triumph. He had been her confidant about the desperate John Macnab, and from her he must learn the tale of her victory. Her pleasure was increased by the consciousness that she was looking her best, for she knew that her black gown was a good French model and well set off her delicate colouring. She looked with eyes of friendship on him as he limped across the room, and noted his lean distinction.

No other country, she thought, produced this kind of slim, graceful, yet weathered and hard-bitten youth.

"Do you know Mr. Claybody?"

Mr. Claybody said he was delighted to meet his neighbour again. "It's years," he said, "since we met at Ronham. I spend my life in the train now, and never get more than a few days at a time at Haripol. But I've managed to secure a month this year to entertain my friends. I was looking forward in any case to seeing you at Muirtown on the 4th. I've been helping to organise the show, and I consider it a great score to have got Laman-cha. This place had never been properly worked, and with a little efficient organisation we ought to put you in right enough. There's no doubt Scotland is changing, and you'll have the tide to help you."

Mr. Claybody was a very splendid person. He looked rather like a larger edition of the great Napoleon, for he had the same full fleshy face, and his head was set on a thickish neck. His blond hair was beautifully sleek, and his clothes were of a perfection uncommon in September north of the Forth. Not that Mr. Claybody was either fat or dandified; he was only what the ballad calls "fair of flesh," and he employed a good tailor and an assiduous valet. His exact age was thirty-two, and he did not look older, once the observer had got over his curiously sophisticated eyes.

But Sir Archie was giving scant attention to Mr. Claybody.

"Have you heard?" Janet broke out. "John Macnab came, saw, and didn't conquer?"

"I've heard nothing else the last two days."

"And I was right! He is a gentleman."

"No? Tell me all about the follow." Sir Archie's interest was perhaps less in the subject than in the animation which it woke in Janet's eyes.

But the announcement that dinner was served cut short the tale, though not before Sir Archie had noticed a sudden set of Mr. Claybody's jaw and a contraction of his eyebrows. "Wonder if he means to stick to his lawyer's letter," he communed with himself. "In that case it's quod for Charles."

The dining-room at Strathlarrig was a remnant of the old house which had been enveloped in the immense sheath of the new. It had eighteenth-century panelling unchanged since the days when Jacobite chiefs in lace and tartan had passed their claret glasses over the water, and the pictures were all of forbidding progenitors. But the ancient narrow windows had been widened, and Sir Archie, from where he sat, had a prospect of half a mile of the river, including Lady Maisie's Pool, bathed in the clear amber of twilight. He was on his host's left hand, opposite the Professor, with Agatha Raden next to him: then came Junius: while Janet was between Johnson Claybody and the guest of the occasion.

Mr. Claybody still brooded over John Macnab.

"I call the whole thing infernal impertinence," he said in his loud, assured voice. "I confess I have ceased to admire undergraduate 'rags.' He threatens to visit us, and my father intends to put the matter into the hands of the police."

"That would be very kind," said Janet sweetly. "You see, John Macnab won't have the slightest trouble in beating the police."

"It's the principle of the thing, Miss Raden. Here is an impudent attack on private property, and if we treat it as a joke it will only encourage other scoundrels. If the man is a gentleman, as you say he is, it makes it more scandalous."

"Come, come, Mr. Claybody, you're taking it too seriously." Colonel Raden could be emphatic enough on the rights of property, but no Highlander can ever grow excited about trespass. "The fellow has made a sporting offer and is willing to risk a pretty handsome stake. I rather admire what you call his impudence. I might have done the same thing as a young man, if I had had the wits to think of it."

Mr. Claybody was quick to recognise an unsympathetic audience. "Oh, I don't mean that we're actually going to make a fuss. We'll give him a warm reception if he comes—that's all. But I don't like the spirit. It's too dangerous in these unsettled times. Once let the masses get into their heads that landed property is a thing to play tricks with, and you take the pin out of the whole system. You must agree with me, Roylance?"

Sir Archie, remembering his part, answered with guile. "Rather! Rotten game for a gentleman, I think. All the same, the chap seems rather a sportsman, so I'm in favour of letting the law alone and dealing with him ourselves. I expect he won't have much of a look in on Haripol."

"I can promise you he won't," said Mr. Claybody shortly.

Professor Babwater observed that it would be difficult for a descendant of Harald Blacktooth to be too hard on one who followed in Harald's steps. "The Celt," he said, "has always sought his adventures in a fairy world. The Northman was a realist, and looked to tangible things like land and cattle. Therefore he was a conqueror and a discoverer on the terrestrial globe, while the Celt explored the mysteries of the spirit. Those who, like you, sir"—he bowed to Colonel Raden—"have both strains in their ancestry, should have successes in both worlds."

"They don't mix well," said the Colonel sadly. "There was my grandfather, who believed in Macpherson's *Ossian* and ruined the family fortunes in hunting for Gaelic manuscripts on the Continent of Europe. And his father was in India with Clive, and thought about nothing except blackmailing native chiefs till he made the place too hot to hold him. Look at my daughters, too. Agatha is mad about poetry and such-like, and Janet is a bandit. She'd have made a dashed good soldier, though."

"Thank you, papa," said the lady. She might have objected to the description had she not seen that Sir Archie accepted it with admiring assent.

"I suppose," said old Mr. Bandicott reflectively, "that the war was bound to leave a good deal of unsettlement. Junius missed it through being too young—never got out of a training camp—but I have noticed that those who fought in France find it difficult to discover a groove. They are energetic enough, but they won't 'stay put,' as we say. Perhaps this Macnab is one of the uprooted. In

your country, where everybody was soldiering, the case must be far more common."

Mr. Claybody announced that he was sick of hearing the war blamed for the average man's deficiencies. "Every waster," he said, "makes an excuse of being shell-shocked. I'm very clear that the war twisted nothing in a man that wasn't twisted before."

Sir Archie demurred. "I don't know. I've seen some pretty bad cases of fellows who used to be as sane as a judge, and came home all shot to bits in their mind."

"There are exceptions, of course. I'm speaking of the general rule. I turn away unemployables every day—good soldiers, maybe, but unemployable—and I doubt if they were ever anything else."

Something in his tone annoyed Janet.

"You saw a lot of service, didn't you?" she asked meekly.

"No—worse luck! They made me stick at home and slave fourteen hours a day at controlling cotton. It would have been a holiday for me to get into the trenches. But what I say is, a sane man usually remained sane. Look at Sir Archibald. We all know what a hectic time he had, and he hasn't turned a hair."

"I'd like you to give me that in writing," Sir Archie grinned. "I've known people who thought I was rather cracked."

"Anyhow, it made no difference to your nerves," said Colonel Raden.

"I hope not. I expect that was because I enjoyed the beastly thing. Perhaps I'm naturally a bit of a bandit—like Miss Janet."

"Perhaps you're John Macnab," said that lady.

"Well, you've seen him and can judge."

"No. I'll be a witness for the defence if you're ever accused. But you mustn't be offended at the idea. I suppose poor John Macnab is now crawling round Strathlarrig trying to find a gap between the gillies to cast a fly."

"That's about the size of it," Junius laughed. "And there's twenty special correspondents in the neighbourhood cursing his name. If they get hold of him, they'll be savager than old Angus."

Mr. Bandicott, after calling his guests' attention to the merits of a hock which he had just acquired—it was a Johannisberg with the blue label—declared that in his belief the war would do good to English life, when the first ferment had died away.

"As a profound admirer of British institutions," he said, "I have sometimes thought that they needed a little shaking up and loosening. In America our classes are fluid. The rich man of to-day began life in a shack, and the next generation may return to it. It is the same with our professions. The man who starts in the law may pass to railway management, and end as the proprietor of a department store. Our belief is that it doesn't matter how often you change your trade before you're fifty. But an Englishman, once he settles in a profession, is fixed in it till the Day of Judgment, and in a few years he gets the mark of it so deep that he'd be a fish out of water in anything else. You can't imagine one of your big barristers doing anything else. No fresh fields and pastures new for them. It would be a crime

against Magna Charta to break loose and try company-promoting or cornering the meat trade for a little change."

Professor Babwater observed that in England they sometimes—in his view to the country's detriment—became politicians.

"That's the narrowest groove of all," said Mr. Bandicott with conviction. "In this country, once you start in on politics you're fixed in a class and members of a hierarchy, and you've got to go on, however unfitted you may be for the job, because it's a sort of high treason to weaken. In America a man tries politics as he tries other things, and if he finds the air of Washington uncongenial he quits, and tries newspapers, or Wall Street, or oil."

"Or the penitentiary," said Junius.

"And why not?" asked his father. "I deplore criminal tendencies in any public man, but the possibility of such a downfall keeps the life human. It is very different in England. The respectability of your politicians is so awful that, when one of them backslides, every man of you combines to hush it up. There would be a revolution if the people got to suspect. Can you imagine a Cabinet Minister in the police court on a common vulgar charge?"

Professor Babwater said he could well imagine it—it was where most of them should be; but Colonel Raden agreed that the decencies had somehow to be preserved, even at the cost of a certain amount of humbug. "But, excuse me," he added, "if I fail to see what good an occasional sentence of six months hard would do to public life."

"I don't want it to happen," said his host, who

was inspired by his own Johannesburg, "but I'd like to think it *could* happen. The permanent possibility of it would supple the minds of your legislators. It would do this old country a power of good if now and then a Cabinet Minister took to brawling and went to jail."

It was a topic which naturally interested Sir Archie, but the theories of Mr. Bandicott passed by him unheeded. For his seat at the table gave him a view of the darkening glen, and he was aware that on that stage a stirring drama was being enacted. His host could see nothing, for it was behind him; the Professor would have had to screw his head round; to Sir Archie alone was vouchsafed a clear prospect. Janet saw that he was gazing abstractedly out of the window, but she did not realise that his eyes were strained and every nerve in him excitedly alive. . . .

For suddenly into his field of vision had darted a man. He was on the far side of the Larrig, running hard, and behind him, at a distance of some forty yards, followed another. At first he thought it was Leithen, but even in the dusk it was plain that it was a shorter man—younger, too, he looked, and of a notable activity. He was gaining on his pursuers, when the chase went out of sight. . . . Then Sir Archie heard a far-away whistling, and would have given much to fling open the window and look out. . . .

Five minutes passed and again the runner appeared—this time dripping wet and on the near side. Clearly not Leithen, for he wore a white sweater, which was a garment unknown to the Crask wardrobe. He must have been headed off

up-stream, and had doubled back. That way danger lay, and Sir Archie longed to warn him, for his route would bring him close to the peopled appendages of Strathlarrig House. . . . Even as he stared he saw what must mean the end, for two figures appeared for one second on the extreme left of his range of vision, and in front of the fugitive. He was running into their arms !

Sir Archie seized his glass of the blue-labelled Johannisberg, swallowed the wine the wrong way, and promptly choked.

When the Hispana crossed the Bridge of Larrig His Majesty's late Attorney-General was modestly concealed in a bush of broom on the Crask side, from which he could watch the sullen stretches of the Lang Whang. He was carefully dressed for the part in a pair of Wattie Lithgow's old trousers much too short for him, a waistcoat and jacket which belonged to Sime the butler and which had been made about the year 1890, and a vulgar flannel shirt borrowed from Shapp. He was innocent of a collar, he had not shaved for two days, and as he had forgotten to have his hair cut before leaving London his locks were of a disreputable length. Last, he had a shocking old hat of Sir Archie's from which the lining had long since gone. His hands were sun-burned and grubby, and he had removed his signet-ring. A light ten-foot green-heart rod lay beside him, already put up, and to the tapered line was fixed a tapered cast ending in a strange little cocked fly. As he waited he was busy oiling fly and line.

His glass showed him an empty haugh, save for

the figure of Jimsie at the far end close to the Wood of Larrigmore. The sun-warmed waters of the river drowsed in the long dead stretches, curled at rare intervals by the faintest western breeze. The banks were crisp green turf, scarcely broken by a boulder, but five yards from them the moss began—a wilderness of hags and tussocks. Somewhere in its depths he knew that Benjie lay coiled like an adder, waiting on events.

Leithen's plan, like all great strategy, was simple. Everything depended on having Jimsie out of sight of the Lang Whang for half an hour. Given that, he believed he might kill a salmon. He had marked out a pool where in the evening fish were usually stirring, one of those irrational haunts which no piscatorial psychologist has ever explained. If he could fish fine and far, he might cover it from a spot below a high bank where only the top of his rod would be visible to watchers at a distance. Unfortunately, that spot was on the other side of the stream. With such tackle, landing a salmon would be a critical business, but there was one chance in ten that it might be accomplished; Benjie would be at hand to conceal the fish, and he himself would disappear silently into the Crask thickets. But every step bristled with horrid dangers. Jimsie might be faithful to his post—in which case it was hopeless; he might find the salmon dour, or a fish might break him in the landing, or Jimsie might return to find him brazenly tethered to forbidden game. It was no good thinking about it. On one thing he was decided: if he were caught, he would not try to escape. That would mean retreat in the direction

of Crask, and an exploration of the Crask covers would assuredly reveal what must at all costs be concealed. No. He would go quietly into captivity, and trust to his base appearance to be let off with a drubbing.

As he waited, watching the pools turn from gold to bronze, as the sun sank behind the Glenraden peaks, he suffered the inevitable reaction. The absurdities seemed huge as mountains, the difficulties innumerable as the waves of the sea. There remained less than an hour in which there would be sufficient light to fish—Jimsie was immovable (he had just lit his pipe and was sitting in meditation on a big stone)—every moment the Larrig waters were cooling with the chill of evening. Leithen consulted his watch, and found it half-past eight. He had lost his wrist-watch, and had brought his hunter, attached to a thin gold chain. That was foolish, so he slipped the chain from his buttonhole and drew it through the arm-hole of his waistcoat.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, for things were happening at the far end of the haugh. Jimsie stood in an attitude of expectation—he seemed to be hearing something far up-stream. Leithen heard it too, the cry of excited men. . . . Jimsie stood on one foot for a moment in doubt ; then he turned and doubled towards the Wood of Larrigmore. . . . The gallant Crossby had got to business and was playing hare to the hounds inside the park wall. If human nature had not changed, Leithen thought, the whole force would presently join in the chase—Angus and Lennox and Jimsie and Davie and doubtless many volunteers. Heaven send fleetness and wind to the South London

Harrier, for it was his duty to occupy the interest of every male in Strathlarrig till such time as he subsided with angry expostulation into captivity.

The road was empty, the valley was deserted, when Leithen raced across the bridge and up the south side of the river. It was not two hundred yards to his chosen stand, a spit of gravel below a high bank at the tail of a long pool. Close to the other bank, nearly thirty yards off, was the shelf where fish lay of an evening. He tested the water with his hand, and its temperature was at least 60°. His theory, which he had learned long ago from the aged Bostonian, was that under such conditions some subconscious memory revived in salmon of their early days as parr when they fed on surface insects, and that they could be made to take a dry fly.

He got out his line to the required length with half a dozen casts in the air, and then put his fly three feet above the spot where a salmon was wont to lie. It was a curious type of cast, which he had been practising lately in the early morning, for by an adroit check he made the fly alight in a curl, so that it floated for a second or two with the leader in a straight line away from it. In this way he believed that the most suspicious fish would see nothing to alarm him, nothing but a hapless insect derelict on the water.

Sir Archie had spoken truth in describing Leithen to Wattie Lithgow as an artist. His long, straight, delicate casts were art indeed. Like thistledown the fly dropped, like thistledown it floated over the head of the salmon, but like thistledown it was disregarded. There was indeed

a faint stirring of curiosity. From where he stood Leithen could see that slight ruffling of the surface which means an observant fish. . . .

Already ten minutes had been spent in this barren art. The crisis craved other measures.

His new policy meant a short line, so with infinite stealth and care Leithen waded up the side of the water, sometimes treading precarious ledges of peat, sometimes waist deep in mud and pond-weed, till he was within twenty feet of the fishing-ground. Here he had not the high bank for a shelter, and would have been sadly conspicuous to Jimsie, had that sentinel remained at his post. He crouched low and cast as before with the same curl just ahead of the chosen spot.

But now his tactics were different. So soon as the fly had floated past where he believed the fish to be, he sank it by a dexterous twist of the rod-point, possible only with a short line. The fly was no longer a winged thing; drawn away under water, it roused in the salmon early memories of succulent nymphs. . . . At the first cast there was a slight swirl, which meant that a fish near the surface had turned to follow the lure. The second cast the line straightened and moved swiftly up stream.

Leithen had killed in his day many hundreds of salmon—once in Norway a notable beast of fifty-five pounds. But no salmon he had ever hooked had stirred in his breast such excitement as this modest fellow of eight pounds. “ ‘ ’Tis not so wide as a church-door,’ ” he reflected with Mercutio, “ ‘ but ’twill suffice ’—if I can only land him.” But a dry-fly cast and a ten-foot rod are a frail

wherewithal for killing a fish against time. With his ordinary fifteen-footer and gut of moderate strength he could have brought the little salmon to grass in five minutes, but now there was immense risk of a break, and a break would mean that the whole enterprise had failed. He dared not exert pressure; on the other hand, he could not follow the fish except by making himself conspicuous on the greensward. Worst of all, he had at the best ten minutes for the job.

Thirty yards off an otter slid into the water. Leithen wished he was King of the Otters, as in the Highland tale, to summon the brute to his aid.

The ten minutes had lengthened to fifteen—nine hundred seconds of heart-disease—when, wet to the waist, he got his pocket-gaff into the salmon's side and drew it on to the spit of gravel where he had started fishing. A dozen times he thought he had lost, and once when the fish ran straight up the pool his line was carried out to its last yard of backing. He gave thanks to high Heaven when, as he landed it, he observed that the fly had all but lost its hold and in another minute would have been free. By such narrow margins are great deeds accomplished.

He snapped the cast from the line and buried it in mud. Then cautiously he raised his head above the bank. The gloaming was gathering fast, and so far as he could see the haugh was still empty. Pushing his rod along the ground, he scrambled on to the turf.

Then he had a grievous shock. Jimsie had reappeared, and he was in full view of him. Moreover, there were two men on bicycles coming up the

road, who, with the deplorable instinct of human nature, would be certain to join in any pursuit. He was on turf as short as a lawn, cumbered with a tell-tale rod and a poached salmon. The friendly hags were a dozen yards off, and before he could reach them his damning baggage would be noted.

At this surpreme moment he had an inspiration, derived from the memory of the otter. To get out his knife, cut a ragged wedge from the fish, and roll it in his handkerchief was the work of five seconds. To tilt the rod over the bank so that it lay in the deep shadow was the work of three more . . . Jimsie had seen him, for a wild cry came down the stream, a cry which brought the cyclists off their machines and set them staring in his direction. Leithen dropped his gaff after the rod, and began running towards the Larrig bridge—slowly, limpingly, like a frightened man with no resolute purpose of escape. And as he ran he prayed that Benjie from the deeps of the moss had seen what had been done and drawn the proper inference.

It was a bold bluff, for he had decided to make the salmon evidence for, not against him. He hobbled down the bank, looking over his shoulder often as if in terror, and almost ran into the arms of the cyclists, who, warned by Jimsie's yells, were waiting to intercept him. He dodged them, however, and cut across to the road, for he had seen that Jimsie had paused and had noted the salmon lying blatantly on the sward, a silver splash in the twilight. Leithen doubled up the road as if going towards Strathlarrig, and Jimsie, the fleet of foot, did not catch up with him till almost on the edge of the Wood of Larrigmore. The cyclists, who

had remounted, arrived at the same moment to find a wretched muddy tramp in the grip of a stalwart but breathless gillie.

"I tell ye I was daein' nae harm," the tramp whined. "I was walkin' up the water-side—there's nae law to keep a body frae walkin' up a water-side when there's nae fence—and I seen an auld otter killin' a saumon. The fish is there still to prove I'm no leein'."

"There is a fush, but you wass thinkin' to steal the fush, and you would have had it in your breeks if I hadna seen you. That is poachin', ma man, and you will come up to Strathlarrig. The master said that anyone goin' near the watter was to be lockit up, and you will be lockit up. You can tell all the lees you like in the mornin'."

Then a thought struck Jimsie. He wanted the salmon, for the subject of otters in the Larrig had been a matter of dispute between him and Angus, and here was evidence for his own view.

"Would you two gentlemen oblige me by watchin' this man while I rin back and get the fush? Bash him on the head if he offers to rin."

The cyclists, who were journalists out to enjoy the evening air, willingly agreed, but Leithen showed no wish to escape. He begged a fag in a beggar's whine, and, since he seemed peaceable, the two kept a good distance for fear of infection. He stood making damp streaks in the dusty road, a pitiable specimen of humanity, for his original get-up was not improved by the liquefaction of his clothes and a generous legacy of slimy peat. He seemed to be nervous, which indeed he was, for if Benjie had not seized his chance he was utterly

done, and if Jimsie should light upon his rod he was gravely compromised.

But when Jimsie returned in a matter of ten minutes he was empty-handed.

"I never kenned the like," he proclaimed. "That otter has come back and gotten the fush. Ach, the maleecious brute!"

The rest of Leithen's progress was not triumphant. He was conducted to the Strathlarrig lodge, where Angus, whose temper and wind had alike been ruined by the pursuit of Crossby, laid savage hands upon him, and frog-marched him to the back premises. The head-keeper scarcely heeded Jimsie's tale. "Ach, ye poachin' va-aga-bond. It is the jyle ye'll get," he roared, for Angus was in a mood which could only be relieved by violence of speech and action. Rumbling Gaelic imprecations, he hustled his prisoner into an outhouse, which had once been a larder and was now a supplementary garage, slammed and locked the door, and, as a final warning, kicked it viciously with his foot, as if to signify what awaited the culprit when the time came to sit on his case.

Sir Archie, if not a skeleton at the feast, was no better than a shadow. The fragment of drama which he had witnessed had rudely divorced his mind from the intelligent conversation of Mr. Bandicott, he was no longer slightly irritated by Mr. Claybody, he forgot even the attractions of Janet. What was going on in that twilit vale? Lady Maisie's Pool had still a shimmer of gold, but the woods were now purple and the waterside turf a dim amethyst, the colour of the darkening sky.

All sound had ceased, except the rare cry of a bird from the hill, and the hoot of a wandering owl. . . . Crossby had beyond doubt been taken, but where was Leithen?

He was recalled to his surroundings by Janet's announcement that Mr. Bandicott proposed to take them all in his car to the meeting at Muirtown.

"Oh, I say," he pleaded, "I'd much rather you didn't. I haven't a notion how to speak—no experience, you see—only about the third time I've opened my mouth in public. I'll make an awful ass of myself, and I'd much rather my friends didn't see it. If I know you're in the audience, Miss Janet, I won't be able to get a word out."

Mr. Bandicott was sympathetic. "Take my advice, and do not attempt to write a speech and learn it by heart. Fill yourself with your subject, but do not prepare anything except the first sentence and the last. You'll find the words come easily when you once begin—if you have something you really want to say."

"That's the trouble—I haven't. I'm going to speak about foreign policy, and I'm dashed if I can remember which treaty is which, and what the French are making a fuss about, or why the old Boche can't pay. And I keep on mixing up Poincaré and Mussolini . . . I'm going to write it all down, and if I'm stuck I'll fish out the paper and read it. I'm told there are fellows in the Cabinet who do that when they're cornered."

"Don't stick too close to the paper," the Colonel advised. "The Highlander objects to sermons read to him, and he may not like a read speech."

"Whatever he does I'm sure Sir Archibald will

be most enlightening," Mr. Bandicott said politely. "Also I want to hear Lord Lamancha. We think rather well of that young man in America. How do you rate him here?"

Mr. Claybody, as a habitant of the great world, replied. "Very high in his own line. He's the old-fashioned type of British statesman, and people trust him. The trouble about him and his kind is that they're a little too far removed from the ordinary man—they've been too cosseted and set on a pedestal all their lives. They don't quite know how to handle democracy. You can't imagine Lamancha rubbing shoulders with Tom, Dick, and Harry."

"Oh, come!" Sir Archie broke in. "In the war he started as a captain in a yeomanry regiment, and he commanded a pretty tough Australian push in Palestine. His men fairly swore by him."

"I daresay," said the other coldly. "The war doesn't count for my argument, and Australians are not quite what I mean."

The butler, who was offering liqueurs, was seen to speak confidentially to Junius, who looked towards his father, made as if to speak, and thought better of it. The elder Mr. Bandicott was once more holding the table.

"My archæological studies," he said, "and my son's devotion to sport are apt to circumscribe the interest of my visits to this country. I do not spend more than a couple of days in London, and when I am there the place is empty. Sometimes I regret that I have not attempted to see more of English society in recent years, for there are many figures

in it I would like to meet. There are some acquaintances, too, that I should be delighted to revive. Do you know Sir Edward Leithen, Mr. Claybody? He was recently, I think, the British Attorney-General."

Mr. Claybody nodded. "I know him very well. We have just briefed him in a big case."

"Sir Edward Leithen visited us two years ago as the guest of our Bar Association. His address was one of the most remarkable I have ever listened to. It was on John Marshall—the finest tribute ever paid to that great man, and one which I venture to say no American could have equalled. I had very little talk with him, but what I had impressed me profoundly with the breadth of his outlook and the powers of his mind. Yes, I should like to meet Sir Edward Leithen again."

The company had risen and were moving towards the drawing-room.

"Now I wonder," Mr. Claybody was saying. "I heard that Leithen was somewhere in Scotland. I wonder if I could get him up for a few days to Haripol. Then I could bring him over here."

An awful joy fell upon Sir Archie's soul. He realised anew the unplumbed preposterousness of life.

Ere they reached the drawing-room Junius took Agatha aside.

"Look here, Miss Agatha, I want you to help me. The gillies have been a little too active. They've gathered in some wretched hobo they found looking at the river, and they've annexed a journalist who stuck his nose inside the gates. It's the journalist that's worrying me. From his card he seems to be

rather a swell in his way—represents the *Monitor* and writes for my father's New York paper. He gave the gillies a fine race for their money, and now he's sitting cursing in the garage and vowing every kind of revenge. It won't do to antagonise the Press, so we'd better let him out and grovel to him, if he wants apologies. . . . The fact is, we're not in a very strong position, fending off the newspapers from Harald Blacktooth because of this ridiculous John Macnab. If you could let the fellow out it would be casting oil on the troubled waters. You could smooth him down far better than me."

"But what about the other? A hobo, you say! That's a tramp, isn't it?"

"Oh, tell Angus to let him out too. Here are the keys of both garages. I don't want to turn this place into a lock-up. Angus won't be pleased, but we have to keep a sharp watch for John Macnab to-morrow, and it's bad tactics in a campaign to cumber yourself with prisoners."

The two threaded mysterious passages and came out into a moonlit stable-yard. Junius handed the girl a great electric torch. "Tell the fellow we eat dirt for our servant's officiousness. Offer him supper, and—I tell you what—ask him to lunch the day after to-morrow. No, that's the Muirtown day. Find out his address and say we'll write to him and give him first chop at the Viking. Blame it all on the gillies."

Agatha unlocked the door of the big garage and to her surprise found it brilliantly lit with electric light. Mr. Crossby was sitting in the driver's seat of a large motor-car, smoking a pipe and composing

a story for his paper. At the sight of Agatha he descended hastily.

"We're so sorry," said the girl. "It's all been a stupid mistake. But, you know, you shouldn't have run away. Mr. Bandicott had to make rules to keep off poachers, and you ought to have stopped and explained who you were."

To this charming lady in the grass-green gown Mr. Crossby's manner was debonair and reassuring.

"No apology is needed. It wasn't in the least the gillies' blame. I wanted some exercise, and I had my fun with them. One of the young ones has a very pretty turn of speed. But I oughtn't to have done it—I quite see that—with everybody here on edge about this John Macnab. Have I your permission to go?"

"Indeed you have. Mr. Bandicott asked me to apologise most humbly. You're quite free unless—unless you'd like to have supper before you go."

Mr. Crossby excused himself, and did not stay upon the order of his going. He knew nothing of the fate of his colleague, and hoped that he might pick up news from Benjie in the neighbourhood of the Wood of Larrigmore.

The other garage stood retired in the lee of a clump of pines—a rude, old-fashioned place, which generally housed the station lorry. Agatha, rather than face the disappointed Angus, decided to complete the task of jail-delivery herself. She had trouble with the lock, and when the door opened she looked into a pit of darkness scarcely lightened by the outer glow of moonshine. She flashed the torch into the interior and saw, seated on a stack of petrol tins, the figure of the tramp.

Leithen, who had been wondering how he was to find a bed in that stony place, beheld the apparition with amazement. He guessed that it was one of the Miss Radens, for he knew that they were dining at Strathlarrig. As he stood sheepishly before her his wits suffered a dislocation which drove out of his head the remembrance of the part he had assumed.

"Mr. Bandicott sent me to tell you that you can go away," the girl said.

"Thank you very much," said Leithen in his ordinary voice.

Now in the scramble up the river bank and in the rough handling of Angus his garments had become disarranged, and his watch had swung out of his pocket. In adjusting it in the garage he had put it back in its normal place, so that the chain showed on Sime's ancient waistcoat. From it depended one of those squat little gold shields which are the badge of athletic prowess at a famous school. As he stood in the light of her torch Agatha noted this shield, and knew what it signified. Also his tone when he spoke had startled her.

"Oh," she cried, "you were at Eton?"

Leithen was for a moment nonplussed. He thought of a dozen lies, and then decided on qualified truth.

"Yes," he murmured shamefacedly. "Long ago I was at Eton."

The girl flushed with embarrassed sympathy.

"What—what brought you to this?" she murmured.

"Folly," said Leithen, recovering himself. "Drink and such-like. I have had a lot of bad luck, but I've mostly myself to blame."

"You're only a tramp now?" Angels might have envied the melting sadness of her voice.

"At present. Sometimes I get a job, but I can't hold it down." Leithen was warming to his work, and his tones were a subtle study in dilapidated gentility.

"Can't anything be done?" Agatha asked, twining her pretty hands.

"Nothing," was the dismal answer. "I'm past helping. Let me go, please, and forget you ever saw me."

"But can't papa . . . won't you tell me your name or where we can find you?"

"My present name is not my own. Forget about me, my dear young lady. The life isn't so bad. . . . I'm as happy as I deserve to be. I want to be off, for I don't like to stumble upon gentlefolks."

She stood aside to let him pass, noting the ruin of his clothes, his dirty unshaven face, the shameless old hat that he raised to her. Then, melancholy and reflective, she returned to Junius. She could not give away one of her own class, so, when Junius asked her about the tramp, she only shrugged her white shoulders. "A miserable creature. I hope Angus wasn't too rough with him. He looked as if a puff of wind would blow him to pieces."

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Ten minutes later Leithen, having unobtrusively climbed the park wall and so escaped the attention of Mactavish at the lodge, was trotting at a remarkable pace for a tramp down the road to the Larrig Bridge. Once on the Crask side, he stopped to

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reconnoitre. Crossby called softly to him from the covert and with Crossby was Benjie.

"I've gotten the saumon," said the latter, "and your rod and gaff too. Hae ye the bit ye howkit out of the fush?"

Leithen produced his bloody handkerchief.

"Now for supper, Benjie my lad," he cried. "Come along, Crossby, and we'll drink the health of John Macnab."

The journalist shook his head. "I'm off to finish my story. The triumphant return of Harald Blacktooth is going to convulse these islands to-morrow."

XXXVI: SIR ARCHIE IS INSTRUCTED IN THE CONDUCT OF LIFE

EARLY next morning, when the great door of Strathlarrig House was opened and the maids had begun their work, Oliphant, the butler—a stately man who had been trained in a ducal family—crossed the hall to reconnoitre the outer world. There he found an under-housemaid nursing a strange package which she averred she had found on the doorstep. It was some two feet long, swathed in brown paper, and attached to its string was a letter inscribed to Mr. Junius Bandicott.

The parcel was clammy and Oliphant handled it gingerly. He cut the cord, disentangled the letter, and revealed an oblong of green rushes bound with string. The wrapping must have been insecure, for something forthwith slipped from the rushes and flopped on the marble floor, revealing to Oliphant's

disgusted eyes a small salmon, blue and stiff in death.

At that moment Junius, always an early bird, came whistling downstairs. So completely was he convinced of the inviolability of the Strathlarrig waters that the spectacle caused him no foreboding.

"What are you flinging fish about for, Oliphant?" he asked cheerfully.

The butler presented him with the envelope. He opened it and extracted a dirty half sheet of note-paper, on which was printed in capitals "With the compliments of John Macnab."

Amazement, chagrin, amusement followed each other on Junius's open countenance. Then he picked up the fish and marched out of doors shouting "Angus" at the top of a notably powerful voice. The sound brought the scared face of Professor Babwater to his bedroom window.

Angus, who had been up since four, appeared from Lady Maisie's Pool, where he had been contemplating the waters. His vigil had not improved his appearance or his temper, for his eye was red and choleric and his hair was wild as a mountain goat's. He cast one look at the salmon, surmised the truth, and held up imploring hands to Heaven.

"John Macnab!" said Junius sternly. "What have you got to say to that?"

Angus had nothing audible to say. He was handling the fish with feverish hands and peering at its jaws, and presently under his fingers a segment fell out.

"That fush was cleekit," observed Lennox, who had come up. "It was never caught with a flee."

"Ye're a leear," Angus roared. "Just tak a look at the mouth of it. There's the mark of the huke, ye gommeril. The fush was took wi' a rod and line."

"You may reckon it was," observed Junius. "I trust John Macnab to abide by the rules of the game."

Suddenly light seemed to break in on Angus's soul. He bellowed for Jimsie, who was placidly making his way towards the group at the door, lighting his pipe as he went.

"Look at that, James Mackenzie. Aye, look at it. Feast your een on it. You wass tellin' me there wass otters in the Larrig and I said there wass not. You wass tellin' me there wass an otter had a fush last night at the Lang Whang. There's your otter and be damned to ye!"

Jimsie, slow of comprehension, rubbed his eyes. "Where wass you findin' the fush? Aye, it's the one I seen last night. That otter must be wrang in the heid."

"It is not wrang in the heid. It's you that are wrang in the heid, James Mackenzie. The otter is a ver-ra clever man, and it's name will be John Macnab."

Slowly enlightenment dawned on Jimsie's mind.

"He wass the tramp," he ingeminated. "He wass the tramp."

"And he's still lockit up," Angus cried joyfully. "Wait till I get my hands on him." He was striding off for the garage when a word from Junius held him back.

"You won't find him there. I gave orders last night to let him go. You know, Angus, you told

me he was only a tramp that had been seen walking up the river."

"We will catch him yet," cried the vindictive head-keeper. "Get you on your bicycle, Jimsie, and away after him. He'll be on the Muirtown road. . . . There's just the one road he can travel."

"No, you don't," said Junius. "I don't want him here. He has beaten us fairly in a match of wits, and the business is finished."

"But the thing's no possible," Jimsie moaned. "The skeeliest fisher would not take a saumon in the Lang Whang with a flee. . . . And I wasna away many meenutes. . . . And the tramp was a poor shilpit body—not like a fisher or any kind of gentleman at all—at all. . . . And he hadna a rod. . . . The thing's no possible."

"Well, who else could it be?"

"I think it was the Deevil."

Jimsie, cross-examined, went over the details of his evening's experience.

"The journalist may have been in league with him—or he may not," Junius reflected. "Anyway, I'll tackle Mr. Crossby. I want to find out what I can about this remarkable sportsman."

"You will not find out anything at all, at all," said Angus morosely. "For I tell ye, sir, Jimsie is right in one thing—Macnab is not a man—he is the Deevil."

"Then we needn't be ashamed of being beat by him. . . . Look here, you men. We've lost, but you've had an uncomfortable time these last twenty-four hours. And I'm going to give you what I promised you if we won out. I reckon the market price of salmon is not more than fifty cents

a pound. Macnab has paid about thirty dollars a pound for this fish, so we've a fair margin on the deal."

Mr Acheson Bandicott received the news with composure, if not with relief. Now he need no longer hold the correspondents at arm's length but could summon them to his presence and enlarge on Harald Blacktooth. His father's equanimity cast whatever balm was needed upon Junius's wounded pride, and presently he saw nothing in the affair but comedy. His thoughts turned to Glenraden. It might be well for him to announce in person that the defences of Strathlarrig had failed.

On his way he called at the post office where Agatha had told him that Crossby was lodging. He wanted a word with the journalist, who clearly must have been *particeps criminis*, and as he could offer as bribe the first full tale of Harald Blacktooth (to be unfolded before the other correspondents arrived for luncheon) he hoped to acquire a story in return. But, according to the postmistress, Mr. Crossby had gone. He had sat up most of the night writing, and, without waiting for breakfast, had paid his bill, strapped on his rucksack, and departed on his bicycle.

Junius found the Raden family on the lawn, and with them Archie Roylance.

"Got up early to go over my speech for tomorrow," the young man explained. "I'm getting the dashed thing by heart—only way to avoid regrettable incidents. I started off down the hill repeating my eloquence, and before I knew I was at Glenraden gates, so I thought I'd come in and pass the time of day. . . . Jolly interesting dinner

last night, Bandicott. I liked your old Professor. . . . Any news of John Macnab ? ”

“ There certainly is. He has us beat to a frazzle. This morning there was a salmon on the doorstep presented with his compliments.”

The effect of this announcement was instant and stupendous. The Colonel called upon his gods. “ Not killed fair ? It’s a stark impossibility, sir. You had the water guarded like the Bank of England.” Archie expressed like suspicions ; Agatha was sad and sympathetic, Janet amused and covertly joyful.

“ I reckon it was fair enough fishing,” Junius went on. “ I’ve been trying to puzzle the thing out, and this is what I make of it. Macnab was in league with one of those pressmen, who started out to trespass inside the park and drew off all the watchers in pursuit, including the man at the Lang Whang. He had them hunting him for about half an hour, and in that time Macnab killed his fish. . . . He must be a dandy at the game, too, to get a salmon in that dead water. . . . Jimsie—that’s the man who was supposed to watch the Lang Whang—returned before he could get away with the beast, so what does the fellow do but dig a bit out of the fish and leave it on the bank, while he lures Jimsie to chase him. Jimsie saw the fish and put it down to an otter, and by and by caught the man up the road. There must have been an accomplice in hiding, for when Jimsie went back to pick up the salmon it had disappeared. The fellow, who looked like a hobo, was shut up in a garage, and after dinner we let him go, for we had nothing against him, and now he is rejoicing somewhere at

our simplicity. . . . It was a mighty clever bit of work, and I'm not ashamed to be beaten by that class of artist. I hoped to get hold of the pressman and find out something, but the pressman seems to have leaked out of the landscape."

"Was that tramp John Macnab?" Agatha asked in an agitated voice.

"None other. You let him out, Miss Agatha. What was he like? I can't get proper hold of Jimsie's talk."

"Oh, I should have guessed," the girl lamented. "For, of course, I saw he was a gentleman. He was in horrible old clothes, but he had an Eton shield on his watch-chain. He seemed to be ashamed to remember it. He said he had come down in the world—through drink!"

Archie struggled hard with the emotions evoked by this description of an abstemious personage currently believed to be making an income of forty thousand pounds.

"Then we've both seen him," Janet cried. "Describe him, Agatha. Was he youngish and big, and fair-haired, and sunburnt? Had he blue eyes?"

"No-o. He wasn't like that. He was about papa's height, and rather slim, I think. He was very dirty and hadn't shaved, but I should say he was sallow, and his eyes—well, they were certainly not blue."

"Are you certain? You only saw him in the dark."

"Yes, quite certain. I had a big torch which lit up his whole figure. Now I come to think of it, he had a striking face—he looked like somebody very

clever—a judge perhaps. That should have made me suspicious, but I was so shocked to see such a downfall that I didn't think about it."

Janet looked wildly around her. "Then there are two John Macnabs."

"Angus thinks he is the Devil," said Junius.

"It looks as if he were a syndicate," said Archie, who felt that some remark was expected of him.

"Well, I'm not complaining," said Junius.

"And now we're off the stage, and can watch the play from the boxes. I hope you won't be shocked, sir, but I wouldn't break my heart if John Macnab got the goods from Haripol."

"By Gad, no!" cried the Colonel. "'Pon my soul, if I could get into touch with the fellow I'd offer to help him—though he'd probably be too much of a sportsman to let me. That young Claybody wants taking down a peg or two. He's the most insufferably assured young prig I ever met in my life."

"He looked the kind of chap who might turn nasty," Sir Archie observed.

"How do you mean?" Junius asked. "Get busy with a gun—that sort of thing?"

"Lord, no. The Claybodys are not likely to start shooting. But they're as rich as Jews, and they're capable of hiring prize-fighters or putting a live wire round the forest. Or I'll tell you what they might do—they might drive every beast on Haripol over the marches and keep 'em out for three days. It would wreck the ground for the season, but they wouldn't mind that—the old man can't get up the hills and the young 'un don't want to."

"Agatha, my dear," said her father, "we ought to return the Claybody's call. Perhaps Mr. Junius would drive us over there in his car this afternoon. For, of course, you'll stay to luncheon, Bandicott—and you, too, Roylance."

Sir Archie stayed to luncheon; he also stayed to tea; and between these meals he went through a surprising experience. For, after the others had started for Haripol, Janet and he drifted aimlessly towards the Raden bridge and then upward through the pine-woods on the road to Carnmore. The strong sun was tempered by the flickering shade of the trees, and, as the road wound itself out of the crannies of the woods to the bare ridges, light wandering winds cooled the cheek, and, mingled with the fragrance of heather and rooty smell of bogs, came a salty freshness from the sea. The wide landscape was as luminous as April—a bad presage for the weather, since the Haripol peaks, which in September should have been dim in a mulberry haze, stood out sharp like cameos. The two did not talk much, for they were getting beyond the stage where formal conversation is felt to be necessary. Sir Archie limped along at a round pace, which was easily matched by the girl at his side. Both would instinctively halt now and then, and survey the prospect without speaking, and both felt that these pregnant silences were bringing them very near to one another.

At last the track ran out in scree, and from a bald summit they were looking down on the first of the Carnmore corries. Janet seated herself on a mossy ledge of rock and looked back into the Raden glen, which from that altitude had the

appearance of an enclosed garden. The meadows of the lower haugh lay green in the sun, the setting of pines by some freak of light was a dark and cloudy blue, and the little castle rose in the midst of the trees with a startling brightness like carven marble. The picture was as exquisite and strange as an illumination in a missal.

"Gad, what a place to live in!" Sir Archie exclaimed.

The girl, who had been gazing at the scene with her chin in her hands, turned on him eyes which were suddenly wistful and rather sad. As contrasted with her sister's, Janet's face had a fine hard finish which gave it a brilliancy like an eager boy's. But now a cloud-wrack had been drawn over the sun.

"We've lived there," she said, "since Harald Blacktooth—at least papa says so. But the end is very near now. We are the very last of the Radens. And that is as it should be, you know."

"I'm hanged if I see that," Sir Archie began, but the girl interrupted.

"Yes, it is as it should be. The old life of the Highlands is going, and people like ourselves must go with it. There's no reason why we should continue to exist. We've long ago lost our justification."

"D'you mean to say that fellows like Claybody have more right to be here?"

"Yes. I think they have, because they're fighters and we're only survivals. They will disappear too, unless they learn their lesson. . . . You see, for a thousand years we have been going on here, and other people like us, but we only

endured because we were alive. We have the usual conventional motto on our coat of arms—*Pro Deo et Rege*—a Heralds' College invention. But our Gaelic motto was very different—it was 'Sons of Dogs, come and I will give you flesh.' As long as we lived up to that we flourished, but as soon as we settled down and went to sleep and became *rentiers* we were bound to decay. . . . My cousins at Glenaicill were just the same. Their motto was 'What I have I hold,' and while they remembered it they were great people. But when they stopped holding they went out like a candle, and the last of them is now living at St. Malo and a Lancashire cotton-spinner owns the place. . . . When we had to fight hard for our possessions all the time, and give flesh to the sons of dogs who were our clan, we were strong men and women. There was a Raden with Robert Bruce—he fell with Douglas in the pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre—and a Raden died beside the King at Flodden—and Radens were in everything that happened in the old days in Scotland and France. But civilisation killed them—they couldn't adapt themselves to it. Somehow the fire went out of the blood, and they became vegetables. Their only claim was the right of property, which is no right at all."

"That's what the Bolsheviks say," said the puzzled Sir Archie.

"Then I'm a Bolshevik. Nobody in the world to-day has a right to anything which he can't justify. That's not politics, it's the way nature works. Whatever you've got—rank or power or fame or money—you've got to justify it, and keep on justifying it, or go under. No law on earth

can buttress up a thing which nature means to decay."

"D'you know that sounds to me pretty steep doctrine?"

"No, it isn't. It isn't doctrine, and it isn't politics, it's common sense. I don't mean that we want some silly government redistributing everybody's property. I mean that people should realise that whatever they've got they hold under a perpetual challenge, and they are bound to meet that challenge. Then we'll have living creatures instead of mummies."

Sir Archie stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I daresay there's a lot in that. But what would Colonel Raden say to it?"

"He would say I was a bandit. And yet he would probably agree with me in the end. Agatha wouldn't, of course. She adores decay—sad old memories and lost causes and all the rest of it. She's a sentimentalist, and she'll marry Junius and go to America, where everybody is sentimental, and be the sweetest thing in the Western hemisphere and live happy ever after. I'm quite different. I believe I'm kind, but I'm certainly hard-hearted. I suppose it's Harald Blacktooth coming out."

Janet had got off her perch, and was standing a yard from Sir Archie, her hat in her hand and the light wind ruffling her hair. The young man, who had no skill in analysing his feelings, felt obscurely that she fitted most exquisitely into the picture of rock and wood and water, that she was, in very truth, a part of this clean elemental world of the hill-tops.

"What about yourself?" she asked. "In the

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words of Mr. Bandicott, are you going to make good? ”

She asked the question with such an air of frank comradeship that Sir Archie was in no way embarrassed. Indeed he was immensely delighted.

“ I hope so,” he said. “ But I don’t know. . . . I’m a bit of a slacker. There doesn’t seem much worth doing since the war.”

“ What nonsense ! You find a thousand things worth doing, but they’re not enough—and they’re not big enough. Do you mean to say you want to hang up your hat at your age and go to sleep ? You need to be challenged.”

“ I expect I do,” he murmured.

“ Well, *I* challenge you. You’re fit and you’re young, and you did extraordinarily well in the war, and you’ve hosts of friends, and—and—you’re well off, aren’t you ? ”

“ Pretty fair. You see, I had a long minority, and—oh yes, I’ve far more money than I want.”

“ There you are. I challenge you. You’re bound to justify what you’ve got. I won’t have you idling away your life till you end as the kind of lean brown old gentleman in a bowler hat that one sees at Newmarket. It’s a very nice type, but it’s not good enough for you, and I won’t have it. You must not be a dilettante pottering about with birds and a little sport and a little politics.”

Sir Archie had been preached at occasionally in his life, but never quite in this way. He was preposterously pleased and also a little solemnised.

“ I’m quite serious about politics.”

“ I wonder,” said Janet, smiling. “ I don’t mean scraping into Parliament, but real politics—

putting the broken pieces together, you know. Papa and the rest of our class want to treat politics like another kind of property in which they have a vested interest. But it won't do—not in the world we live in to-day. If you're going to do any good you must feel the challenge and be ready to meet it. And then you must become yourself a challenger. You must be like John Macnab."

Sir Archie stared.

"I don't mean that I want you to make poaching wagers like John. You can't live in a place and play those tricks with your neighbours. But I want you to follow what Mr. Bandicott would call the 'John Macnab proposition.' It's so good for everybody concerned. Papa has never had so much fun out of his forest as in the days he was repelling invasion, and even Mr. Junius found a new interest in the Larrig. . . . I'm all for property, if you can defend it; but there are too many fatted calves in the world."

Sir Archie suddenly broke into loud laughter.

"Most people tell me I'm too mad to do much good in anything. But you say I'm not mad enough. Well, I'm all for challenging the fatted calves, but I don't fancy that's the road that leads to the Cabinet. More likely the jail, with a red flag firmly clenched in my manly hand."

The girl laughed too. "Papa says that the man who doesn't give a damn for anybody can do anything he likes in the world. Most people give many damns for all kinds of foolish things. Mr. Claybody, for example—his smart friends, like Lord Lamanca and the Attorney-General—what is his name?—Leithen?—and his silly little position,

and his father's new peerage. But you're not like that. I believe that all wisdom consists in caring immensely for the few right things and not caring a straw about the rest."

Had anyone hinted to Sir Archie that a young woman on a Scots mountain could lecture him gravely on his future and still remain a ravishing and adorable thing he would have dismissed the suggestion with incredulity. At the back of his head he had that fear of women as something mysterious and unintelligible which belongs to a motherless and sisterless childhood, and a youth spent almost wholly in the company of men. He had immense compassion for a sex which seemed to him to have a hard patch to hoe in the world, and this pitifulness had always kept him from any conduct which might harm a woman. His numerous fancies had been light and transient like thistledown, and his heart had been wholly unscathed. Fear that he might stumble into marriage had made him as shy as a woodcock—a fear not without grounds, for a friend had once proposed to write a book called *Lives of the Hunted*, with a chapter on Archie. Wherefore, his hour having come, he had cascaded into love with desperate completeness, and with the freshness of a mind unstaled by disillusion. . . . All he knew was that a miraculous being had suddenly flooded his world with a new radiance, and was now opening doors and inviting him to dazzling prospects. He felt at once marvellously confident and supremely humble. Never had mistress a more docile pupil.

They wandered back to the house, and Janet gave him tea in a room full of faded chintzes and

Chinese-Chippendale mirrors. Then, when the sun was declining behind the Carnmore peaks, Sir Archie at last took his leave. His head was in a happy confusion, but two ideas rose above the surge—he would seize the earliest chance of asking Janet to marry him, and by all his gods he must not make a fool of himself at Muirtown. She had challenged him, and he had accepted the challenge; he must make it good before he could become in turn a challenger. It may be doubted if Sir Archie had any very clear notions on the matter, but he was aware that he had received an inspiration, and that somehow or other everything was now to be different. . . . First for that confounded speech. He strove to recollect the sentences which had followed each other so trippingly during his morning's walk. But he could not concentrate his mind. Peace treaties and German reparations and the recognition of Russia flitted from him like a rapid film to be replaced by a "close-up" of a girl's face. Besides, he wanted to sing, and when song flows to the lips consecutive thought is washed out of the brain.

In this happy and exalted mood, dedicate to great enterprises of love and service, Sir Archie entered the Crask smoking-room, to be brought heavily to earth by the sordid business of John Macnab.

Leithen was there, reading a volume of Sir Walter Scott with an air of divine detachment. Lamanha, very warm and dishevelled, was endeavouring to quench his thirst with a large whisky-and-soda; Palliser-Yeates, also the worse for wear, lay in an attitude of extreme fatigue on a sofa;

Crossby, who had sought sanctuary at Crask, was busy with the newspapers which had just arrived, while Wattie Lithgow stood leaning on his crook staring into vacancy, like a clown from some stage Arcadia.

"Where on earth have you been all day, Archie?" Lamancha asked sternly.

"I walked over to Glenraden and stayed to luncheon. They're all hot on your side there—Bandicott too. There's a general feeling that young Claybody wants taking down a peg."

"Much good that will do us. John and Wattie and I have been crawling all day round the Haripol marches. It's pretty clear what they'll do—you think so, Wattie?"

"Alan Macnicol is not altogether a fule. Aye, I ken fine what they'll dae."

"Clear the beasts off the ground?" Archie suggested.

"No," said Lamancha. "Move them into the Sanctuary, and the Sanctuary is in the very heart of the forest—between Sgurr Mór and Sgurr Dearg at the head of the Reascuill. It won't take many men to watch it. And the mischief is that Haripol is the one forest where it can be done quite simply. It's so infernally rough that if the deer were all over it I would back myself to get a shot with a fair chance of removing the beast, but if every stag is inside an inner corral it will be the devil's own business to get within a thousand yards of them—let alone shift the carcass."

"If the wind keeps in the west," said Wattie, "it is a manifest impossibeelity. If it was in the north there would be a verra wee sma' chance. All other

airts are hopeless. We maun just possess our souls in patience, and see what the day brings forth. . . . I'll awa and mak arrangements for the morn."

Lamancha nodded after the retreating figure.

"He is determined to go to Muirtown to-morrow. Says you promised that he should be present when you made your first bow in public, and that he has arranged with Shapp to drive him in the Ford. . . . But about Haripol. This idea of Wattie's—and I expect it's right—makes the job look pretty desperate. I had worked out a very sound scheme to set my Lord Claybody guessing—similar to John's Glenraden plan but more ingenious; but what's the use of bluff if every beast is snug in an upper corrie with a cordon of Claybody's men round it? Wattie says that Haripol is fairly crawling with gillies."

Crossby raised his head from his journalistic researches. "The papers have got my story all right, I see. The first one I mean—the 'Return of Harald Blacktooth.' They've featured it well, too, and I expect the evening papers are now going large on it. But it's nothing to what the second will be to-morrow morning. I'm prepared to bet that our Scottish Tutankhamen drops out of the running, and that the Press of this land thinks of nothing for a week except the salmon Sir Edward got last night. It's the silly season, remember!"

Lamancha's jaw dropped. "Crossby, I don't want to dash your natural satisfaction, but I'm afraid you've put me finally in the cart. If the public wakes up and takes an interest in Haripol, I may as well chuck in my hand."

"I wasn't such an ass as to mention Haripol," said the correspondent.

"No, but of course it will get out. Some of your journalistic colleagues will hear of it at Strathlarrig, and, finding that the interest has departed from Harald Blacktooth, will make a bee-line for Haripol. Your success, which I don't grudge you, will be my ruin. In any case the Claybodys will be put on their mettle, for, if they are beaten by John Macnab, they know they'll be a public laughing-stock. . . . What sort of fellow is young Claybody, Archie?"

"Bit shaggy about the heels. Great admirer of yours. Ask Ned—he said he knew Ned very well."

Leithen raised his eyes from *Redgauntlet*. "Never heard of the fellow in my life."

"Oh yes, you have. He said he had briefed you in a big case."

"Well, you can't expect me to know all my clients any more than John knows the customers of his little bank." Leithen relapsed into Sir Walter.

"I'm going to have a bath." Lamancha rose and cautiously relaxed his weary limbs. "I seem to be in for the most imbecile escapade in history with about one chance in a billion. That's Wattie's estimate, and he knows what a billion is, which I don't."

"What about dropping it?" Archie suggested; for, though he was sworn to the "John Macnab proposition," he was growing very nervous about this particular manifestation. "Young Claybody is an ugly customer, and we don't want the thing to

end in bad blood. Besides, you're cured already—you told me so yesterday."

"That's true," said Lamancha, who was engaged in tossing with Palliser-Yeates for the big bath. "I'm cured. I never felt keener in my life. I'm so keen that there's nothing on earth you could offer me which would keep me away from Haripol. . . . You win, John. Gentlemen of the Guard, fire first, and don't be long about it. I can't stretch myself in that drain-pipe that Archie calls his second bathroom."

Dinner was a cheerful meal, for Mr. Crossby had much to say, Lamancha was in high spirits, and Leithen had the benignity of the successful warrior. But the host was silent and abstracted. He managed to banish Haripol from his mind, but he thought of Janet, he thought of Janet's sermon, and in feverish intervals he tried to think of his speech for the morrow. A sense of a vast insecurity had come upon him, of a shining goal which grew brighter the more he reflected upon it, but of some awkward hurdles to get over first.

Afterwards, when the talk was of Haripol, he turned to the newspapers to restore him to the world of stern realities. He did not read that masterpiece of journalism, Crossby's story, but he found a sober comfort in *The Times'* leading articles, and in the political notes. He felt himself a worker among *flâneurs*.

"Here's something about you, Charles," he said. "This paper says that political circles are looking forward with great interest to your speech at Muirtown. Says it will be the first important utterance since Parliament rose, and that you are expected

to deal with Poincaré's speech at Rheims and a letter by a Boche whose name I can't pronounce."

"Political circles will be disappointed," said Lamancha, "for I haven't read them. Montgomery is taking all the boxes and I haven't heard from the office for three weeks. I can't be troubled with newspapers in the Highlands."

"Then what are you going to say to-morrow?" Archie demanded anxiously.

"I'll think of some rot. Don't worry, old fellow. Muirtown is a second-class show compared to Haripol."

Archie was really shocked. He was envious of a man who could treat thus cavalierly a task which affected him with horrid forebodings and also scandalised at the levity of his leaders. It seemed to him that Lamancha needed some challenging. Finding no comfort in his company, he repaired to bed, where healthful sleep was slow in visiting him. He repeated his speech to himself, but it would persist in getting tangled up with Janet's sermon and his own subsequent reflections, so that, when at last he dropped off, it was into a world of ridiculous dreams where a dreadful composite figure—Poincarini or Mussolinaré—sat heavily on his chest.

XXXVII: SIR ARCHIE INSTRUCTS HIS COUNTRYMEN

CROSSBY was right in his forecast. The sudden interest in the Scottish Tutankhamen did not survive the revelation of Harald Blacktooth's reincarnation as John Macnab. The twenty

correspondents, after lunching heavily with Mr. Bandicott, had been shown the relics of the Viking and had heard their significance expounded by their host and Professor Babwater ; each had duly despatched his story, but before nightfall each was receiving urgent telegrams from his paper clamouring for news, not of Harald, but of Harald's successor. Crossby's tale of the frustrated attempt on the Glenraden deer had intrigued several million readers—it was the silly season, remember—and his hint of the impending raid on the Strathlarrig salmon had stirred the popular interest vowed to any lawless mystery and any competitive sport. In the doings of John Macnab were blended the splendid uncertainty of a well-matched prize fight and the delicious obscurity of crime. Next morning the news of John's victory at Strathlarrig was received by the several million readers with an enthusiasm denied to the greater matters of public conduct. John Macnab became a slogan for the newsboy, a flaming legend for bills and headlines, a subject of delighted talk at every breakfast-table. Never had there been a more famous eight-pound salmon since fish first swam in the sea.

It was a cold grey morning when Lamancha and Archie left Crask in the Hispana, bound for the station of Bridge of Gair, fifty miles distant by indifferent hill-roads. Lamancha, who had written for clothes, was magnificently respectable below his heavy ulster—a respectability which was not his usual habit but a concession to the urgent demand for camouflage. He was also in a bad temper, for his legs were still abominably stiff, and, though in need of at least ten hours' sleep, he had been

allowed precisely six. At long last, too, his speech had begun to weigh upon him. "Shut up, Archie," he had told his host. "I must collect what's left of my wits, or I'll make an exhibition of myself. You say we get the morning's papers at Bridge of Gair? They may give me a point or two. Lord, it's like one of those beastly mornings in Switzerland, when they rake you up at two to climb Mont Blanc and you wish you had never been born."

Sir Archie had no inclination to garrulity, for black fear had settled on his soul. In a few hours' time he would be doing what he had never done before, standing before a gaping audience which was there to be amused and possibly instructed. He had a speech in his pocket, carefully fashioned in consultation with Lamancha, but he was miserably conscious that it had no relation to his native wood-notes. What was Poincaré to him, or he to Poincaré? Why on earth had he not chosen to speak about something which touched his interests—farming, for example, on which he held views, or the future of the Air Force—instead of venturing in the unknown desert of foreign affairs? Well, he had burned his boats and must make the best of it. The great thing was to be sure that the confounded speech had been transferred from paper to his memory.

But as the miles slipped behind him he realised with horror that his memory was playing him false. He could not get the bits to fit in; what he had reeled off so smoothly twenty-four hours ago now came out in idiotic shreds and patches. He felt himself slipping into a worse funk than he had ever

known in all his tempestuous days. . . . For a moment he thought of throwing up the sponge. He might engineer a breakdown—it would have to be a bad spill, for the day was yet young—and so deprive Muirtown of the presence of both Lamancha and himself. It was not the thought of the Unionist cause or his own political chances that made him reject this cowardly expedient. Two reasons dissuaded him: one, that though his friends continually prophesied disaster, he had never yet had a smash with his car, and his pride was involved; the other, that such a course would reveal Lamancha's presence in his company too near the suspect neighbourhood and might expose the secret of John Macnab. . . . No, he had to go through with it, and, conning such wretched fragments of his oratory as he could dig out of his recollection, Sir Archie drove the Hispana over the bleak moorlands till he was looking down on the wide strath of the Gair, with the railway-line scarring the heather and the hotel chimneys smoking beside a cold blue-grey river. He had glanced now and then at his fellow orator, whose professional apathy he profoundly envied, since for the last dozen miles Lamancha had been peacefully asleep.

They breakfasted at the hotel, and presently sought the station platform in the quest for papers. They were informed that papers came with the train for which they were waiting, and when the said train arrived, half an hour late, and Lamancha, according to arrangement, had sought a seat in the front while Archie favoured the rear, the latter secured a London evening paper of the previous

day and that morning's *Scotsman*. The compartment in which he found himself was crowded with sleepy and short-tempered people who had made the night journey from the south. So on a pile of three gun-cases in the corridor Archie sat himself, and gave his attention to the enlightened Press of his country.

He rubbed his eyes to make certain that he was not dreaming. For there, in conspicuous print on a prominent page of a respected newspaper, was the name of John Macnab. There was other news: of outrages in Mexico and earthquakes in the Pacific, of the disappearance of a solicitor and the arrival in London of a cinema star, but all seemed dwarfed and paled by Crossby's story. There was news of Harald Blacktooth, too, and authentic descriptions of the treasure-trove, but this was in an unconsidered corner. Cheek by jowl with the leading article was what clearly most interested the editor out of all the events on the surface of the globe—the renascence of Harald Blacktooth phoenix-like from his ashes, and the capture of the Strathlarrig salmon.

Archie read the thing confusedly without taking much of it in. Then he turned to the London evening paper. It was a journal which never objected to breaking up its front page for spicy news, and there on the front page was a summary of the Strathlarrig exploit. Moreover, there was a short, hastily compiled article on the subject and a number of stimulating notes. John Macnab was becoming a household name, and the gaze of Britain was being centred on his shy personality. The third act in the drama would be played under

bright light to a full gallery. . . . Archie's eyes caught the end of the first *Scotsman* leader, which contained a reference to the Muirtown meeting, and a speculation as to what the Secretary of State for the Dominions would say. Archie, too, speculated as to what Lamanca was saying at that moment at the other end of the train.

This new complexity did something to quiet his nerves and take his mind off his approaching ordeal. There was no word in the papers of the coming raid on Haripol—Crossby had had that much sense—but, of course, whatever happened at Haripol would be broadcast through the land. The Claybodys, if they defeated John Macnab, would be famous ; ridiculous, if they were beaten ; and, while the latter fate might be taken with good humour by the Bandicotts, it would be gall and wormwood to a young gentleman with strong notions on the rights and dignities of landed property. It was mathematically certain that Johnson Claybody, as soon as he saw the newspapers, would devote all the powers of a not insignificant mind and the energies of a stubborn temper to the defence of Haripol. That was bad enough, but the correspondents at Strathlarrig were likely to have heard by this time of the third of John Macnab's wagers, and the attempt might have to be made under their argus-eyed espionage. Altogether, things were beginning to look rather dark for John, and incidentally for Sir Archie.

These morose reflections occupied him till the train stopped at Frew, the ticket-station for Muirtown. Here, according to plan, Sir Archie descended, for he could not arrive at the terminus in

Lamancha's company. There was a cold gusty wind from the north-west which promised rain, the sky was overcast, and the sea, half a mile distant across the sand-dunes, was grey and sullen. Sir Archie, having two hours to fill before the official luncheon, resolved to reject the ancient station fly and walk. . . . Once again the shadow of his speech descended on him. He limped along the shore road, trying to see the words as he had written them down, trying especially to get the initial sentence clear for each paragraph, for he believed that if he remembered these the rest would follow. The thing went rather better now. Parts came in a cascade of glibness, and he remembered Lamancha's injunction not to be too dapper or too rapid. The peroration was all right, and so was the exordium; only one passage near the middle seemed to offer a snag. He devoted the rest of his walk exclusively to this passage, till he was assured that he had it by heart.

He reached Muirtown within an hour, and decided to kill time by visiting some of his friends among the shopkeepers. The gunmaker welcomed him cordially, and announced his intention of coming to hear him that afternoon. But politics had clearly been ousted from that worthy's head by the newspaper which lay on his counter. "What about this John Macnab, Sir Erchibald," he asked.

"What about him? I'm hanged if I know what to think."

"If Mr. Tarras wasn't deid in Africa I would ken fine what to think. The man will likely be a gentleman, and he must be a grand fisher. I ken

that bit o' the Larrig, and to get a salmon in it wants a fair demon at the job. Crask is no three miles away. D'ye hear nothing at Crask?"

It was the same wherever he went. The fishmonger pointed to a fish on his slabs, and observed that it would be about the size of the one taken at Strathlarrig. The bookseller, who knew his customer's simple tastes in letters, regretted that no contemporary novel of his acquaintance promised such entertainment as the drama now being enacted in Wester Ross. Tired of needless lying, Sir Archie forsook the shops and went for a stroll beside the harbour. But even there John Macnab seemed to pursue him. Wherever he saw a man with a paper he knew what he was reading, the people at the street corners were no doubt discussing the same subject—nay, he was sure he heard the very words spoken as he passed. . . . The sight of a blue poster with his name in large letters reminded him of his duties, and he turned his steps towards the Northern Club.

He was greeted by his host, a Baillie of the town (the Provost belonged to the enemy camp), and was presented to the other guests. "This is our candidate for Wester Ross, my lord," and Archie was introduced to Lamanca, who smiled urbanely and remarked that he had had the pleasure of meeting Sir Archibald Roylance before. The Duke of Angus would not arrive till the hour of meeting, but Colonel Wavertree was there, a dapper red-faced gentleman who had an interest in breweries, and Mr. Murdoch of New Caledonia—immense, grizzled and bearded, who had left the Lews as a child of three for the climes which had given him

fortune. Also there was Lord Claybody, who came forward at once to renew his acquaintance.

"Very glad to see you, Sir Archibald. This is your first big meeting, isn't it? Good luck to you. A straightforward declaration of principles is what we want from our future member, and I've no doubt we'll get it from you. Johnson sent his humblest apologies. He drove me in this morning, but unfortunately a troublesome bit of business took him back at once."

Sir Archie thought he knew what that business was. He had always rather liked old Claybody, and now that he had leisure to study him the liking was confirmed. There was much of the son's arrogance about the eyes and mouth, but there was humour, too, which was lacking in Johnson, and his voice had a pleasant Midland burr. But he looked horribly competent and wide-awake. One would, thought Sir Archie, if one had made a great fortune oneself, and he concluded that the owner of Haripol was probably a bad man to get up against.

At luncheon they should have talked of the state of the nation and the future of their party; instead they talked of John Macnab. It was to be noted that Lord Claybody did not contribute much to the talk; he pursed his lips when the name was mentioned, and he did not reveal the challenge to Haripol. Patently he shared his son's views on the matter. But the others made no secret of their interest. Colonel Wavertree, who had come in from a neighbouring grouse-moor, was positive that the ruffian's escapades were not over. "He'll go round the lot of us," he said, "and though it

costs him fifty pound a time, I daresay he gets his money's worth. I believe he is paid by the agents to put up the price of Highland places, for if he keeps on it will mean money in the pocket of every sporting tenant, besides the devil of a lot of fun." Mr. Murdoch said it reminded him of the doings of one Pink Jones in New Caledonia forty years ago, and told a long and pointless tale of that hero. As for Lamancha, he requested to be given the whole story, and made a very good show of merriment. "A parcel of undergraduates, I suppose," he said.

But the Baillie, who gave him the information, was a serious man and disapproved. "It will get the countryside a bad name, my lord. It is a challenge to law and order. There's too many Bolsheviks about as it is, without this John Macnab aidin' and abettin' them."

"Most likely the fellow is a sound Tory," said Lamancha; but the Baillie ventured respectfully to differ. "If your lordship will forgive me, there's some things too serious for jokin'," he concluded sententiously.

It was a dull luncheon, but to Archie the hours passed like fevered seconds. Agoraphobia had seized him once more, and he felt his tongue dry and his stomach hollow with trepidation. Food did not permit itself to be swallowed, so he contented himself with drinking two whisky-and-sodas. Towards the close of the meal that wild form of valour which we call desperation was growing in him. He could do nothing more about his infernal speech, and must fling himself on fortune.

As they left the table the Baillie claimed him. "Your agent is here, Sir Archibald. He wanted a word with you before the meeting."

A lean, red-haired man awaited them in the hall. "Hullo, Mr. Brodie. How are you? Glad to see you. Well, what's the drill for this afternoon?"

"It's that I was wantin' to see ye about, 'sir. The arrangement was that you should speak first, then Lord Lamancha, then Colonel Wavertree, and Mr. Murdoch to finish off. But Baillie Dorrit thinks Lord Lamancha should open, him bein' a Cabinet Minister, and that you should follow."

"Right-o, Brodie! I'm game for anything you like. I've been a slack candidate up to now, and I don't profess to know the job like you." Sir Archie spoke with a jauntiness which made his heart sink, but the agent was impressed.

"Fine, sir. I can see ye're in grand fettle. Ye'll have a remarkable audience. There's been a demand for tickets far beyond the capacity o' the hall, and I hear of folk comin' from fifty mile round."

Every word was like a knell to the wretched Archie, but with his spirits in the depths his manner took on a ghastly exhilaration. He lit a cigar with shaking fingers, patted Brodie on the back, linked his arm with the Baillie's, and in the short walk to the hall chattered like a magpie. So fevered was his behaviour that, as they entered the building by a side-door, Lamancha whispered in his ear, "Steady, old man. For God's sake, keep your head," and Archie turned on him a face like a lost soul's.

"I'm going over the top," he said.

The Town Hall of Muirtown, having been built originally for the purpose of a drill-hall, was capable of holding inside its bare walls the better part of two thousand people. This afternoon it was packed to the door, presumably with voters, for the attendants had ruthlessly turned away all juvenile politicians. As Sir Archie took his seat on the platform, while a selection from the Muirtown Brass Band rendered "Annie Laurie," he seemed to be looking down as from an aeroplane on a strange, unfeatured country. The faces might have been tombstones for all the personality they represented. Some of his friends were there, no doubt, but he could no more have recognised them than he could have picked out the starling which haunted the Crask lawn from a flock seen next day on the hill. The place swam in a mist, like a corrie viewed in the morning from the hill-tops, and he knew that the mist came out of his own quaking soul. He had heard of stage-fright, but had never dreamed that it could be such a blackness of darkness.

The Duke of Angus was very old, highly respected, and almost wholly witless. He had never been very clever—Disraeli, it was said, had refused him the Thistle on the ground that he would eat it—and of late years his mind had retired into a happy vacuity. As a chairman he was mercifully brief. He told a Scots story, at which he shook with laughter but the point of which he unfortunately left out; he repeated very loudly the names of the speakers—Sir Archie started at the sound of his own like a scared fawn; in a tone

which was almost a bellow he uttered the words "Lord Lamancha," and then he sat down.

Lamancha had the reception which is always accorded to a man whose name is often in the newspapers. Most of the audience had never seen him in the flesh, and human nature is grateful for satisfied curiosity. Presently he had them docile under the spell of his charming voice. He never attempted oratory in the grand style, but he possessed all the lesser accomplishments. He had nothing new to say, but he said the old things with a pleasant sincerity and that simplicity which is the result only of a long-practised art. It was the kind of speech of which he had made hundreds and would make hundreds more ; there was nothing in it to lay hold of, but it produced an impression of being at once weighty and spontaneous, flattering to the audience and a proof of the speaker's easy mastery of his trade. There was a compliment to the Duke, a warm tribute to Sir Archie, a bantering profession of shyness on the part of a Borderer speaking north of the Forth. Then, by an easy transition, he passed to Highland problems—the land, emigration, the ex-service men—and thence to the prime economic needs of Britain since 1918, the relation of these needs to world demands, the necessity of meeting them by using the full assets of an Empire which had been a unit in war and should be a unit in peace. There was little to inspire, but little to question ; platitudes were so artfully linked together as to give the impression of a rounded and stable creed. Here was one who spoke seriously, responsibly, and yet with optimism ; there was character here, said the ordinary

man, and yet obviously a mind as well. Even the stern critics on the back benches had no fault to find with a statement from which they could only dissent with respect. None recognised that it was the manner that bewitched them. Lamancha, who on occasion could be profound, was now only improvising. The matter was a mosaic of bits of old speeches and answers to deputations, which he put together cynically with his left hand. But the manner was superb—the perfect production of a fine voice, the cunning emphasis, the sudden halts, the rounded cadences, the calculated hesitations. He sat down after forty minutes amid a tempest of that applause which is the tribute to professional skill and has nothing to do with conviction.

Sir Archie had listened with awe. Knowing now from bitter experience the thorny path of oratory, he was dumbfounded by this spectacle of a perfection of which he had never dreamed. What a fiasco would his halting utterance be in such company! He glanced at the notes in his hand, but could not read them; he strove to remember his opening sentences, and discovered them elusive. Then suddenly he heard his name spoken, and found himself on his feet.

He was scarcely aware of the applause with which he was greeted. All he knew was that every word of his speech had fled from his memory and would never return. The faces below him were a horrid white blur at which he knew he was foolishly grinning. . . . In his pocket was an oration carefully written out. If he were to pluck it forth, and try to read it, he knew that he could not make

sense of a word, for his eyes had lost the power of sight. . . . Profound inertia seized him ; he must do something, but there was a dreadful temptation to do nothing, just to go on grinning, like a man in a nightmare who finds himself in the track of an express train.

Nevertheless, such automata are we, he was speaking. He did not know what he was saying, but as a matter of fact he was repeating the words with which the chairman had introduced him. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are fortunate in the privilege of having heard so stirring and statesman-like an address as that which His Majesty's Secretary of State of the Dominions has just delivered. Now we are to hear what our gallant and enterprising friend, the prospective candidate for Wester Ross, has to say to us about the problems which confront the nation."

He repeated this exordium like a parrot. The audience scented a mild joke, and laughed. . . . Then in a twittering falsetto he repeated it again—this time in silence. There was a vague sense that something had gone wrong. He was about to repeat it a third time, and then the crash would have come, and he would have retired gibbering from the field.

The situation was saved by Wattie Lithgow. Seated at the back of the hall, Wattie saw that his master was in deadly peril, and took the only way to save him. He had a voice of immense compass, and he used it to the full.

"Speak up, man," he roared. "I canna hear a word ye're sayin'."

There were shouts of "Order," and the stewards

glared angrily at Wattie, but the trick had been done. Sir Archie's eyes opened, and he saw the audience no longer like turnips in a field, but as living and probably friendly human beings. Above all, he saw Wattie's gnarled face and anxious eyes. Suddenly his brain cleared, and, had he desired it, he could have reeled off the speech in his pocket as glibly as he had repeated it in the solitude of Crask. But he felt that that was no longer possible. The situation required a different kind of speech, and he believed he could make it. He would speak direct to Wattie, as he had often lectured him in the Crask smoking-room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said—and his voice had become full and confident—"your gallant and enterprising friend is not much of a hand at public speaking. I have still my job to learn, and with your help I hope soon to learn it. What I have to say to you this afternoon is the outcome of my first amateurish study of public questions. You may take it that my views are honest and my own. I am not a gramophone."

In this last sentence he lied, for what he said was for the most part not his own; it was the sermon which Janet Raden had preached him the day before in the clear air of the Carnmore tops. Mixed up with it were fragments of old discourses of his own to Wattie, and reflections which had come to him in the last ten years of a variegated life. The manner was staccato, the style was slangy and inelegant, but it was not a lesson learned and recited, but words spoken direct to those into whose eyes he was looking. He had found touch with his audience, and he held their attention in a vice.

It was a strange, inconsequent speech, but it had a curious appeal in it—the appeal of youth and candour and courage. It was philosophy rather than politics, a ragged but arresting philosophy. He began by confessing that the war had left the world in a muddle, a muddle which affected his own mind. The only cure was to be honest with oneself, and to refuse to accept specious nonsense and conventional jargon. He told the story from Andersen of the Emperor's New Suit. "Our opponents call us Tories," he said; "they can call us anything they jolly well please. I am proud to be called a Tory. I understand that the name was first given by Titus Oates to those who disbelieved in his Popish Plot. What we want to-day is Toryism—the courage to give the lie to impudent rogues."

That was a memory of Leithen's table talk. The rest was all from Janet Raden. He preached the doctrine of Challenge; of no privilege without responsibility, of only one right of man—the right to do his duty; of all power and property held on sufferance. These were the thoughts which had been growing in his head since yesterday afternoon. He spoke of the changing face of the land—the Highlands ceasing to be the home of men and becoming the mere raw material of picture post-cards, the old gentry elbowed out and retiring with a few trinkets and pictures and the war medals of their dead to suburban lodgings. It all came of not meeting the challenge. . . . What was Bolshevism but a challenge, perhaps a much-needed challenge, to make certain of the faith that was in a man? He had no patience with the timorous and whining

rich. No law could protect them unless they made themselves worth protecting. As a Tory, he believed that the old buildings were still sound, but they must be swept and garnished, that the ancient weapons were the best, but they must be kept bright and shining and ready for use. So soon as a cause feared inquiry and the light of day that cause was doomed. The ostrich, hiding its head in the sand, left its rump a fatal temptation to the boot of the passer-by.

Sir Archie was not always clear, he was often ungrammatical, and he nobly mixed his metaphors, but he held his audience tight. He did more, when at the close of his speech he put his case in the form of an apologue—the apologue of John Macnab. The mention of the name brought laughter and loud cheering. John Macnab, he said, was abroad in the world to-day, like a catfish among a shoal of herrings. He had his defects, no doubt, but he was badly wanted, for he was at bottom a sportsman and his challenge had to be met. Even if the game went against them the challenged did not wholly lose, for they were stirred out of apathy into life.

No queerer speech was ever made by a candidate on his first public appearance. It had no kind of success with the Baillie, nor, it may be presumed, with Lord Claybody ; indeed, I doubt if any of the distinguished folk on the platform quite approved of it, except Lamanca. But there was no question of its appeal to the audience, and the applause which had followed Lamanca's peroration was as nothing to that amid which Sir Archie resumed his seat.

At the back of the hall a wild-eyed man sitting near Wattie Lithgow had been vociferous in his plaudits. "He ca's himsel' a Tory. By God, it's the red flag that he'll be wavin' soon."

"If you say that again," said Wattie fiercely, "I'll smash your heid."

"Keep your hair on," was the reply. "I'm for the young ane, whatever he ca's himsel'."

Archie sat down with his brain in a whirl, for he had tasted the most delirious of joys—the sense of having moved a multitude. He had never felt happier in his life—or, let it be added, more truly amazed. A fiery trial was over, and brilliantly over. He had spoken straightforwardly to his fellow-mortals with ease and acceptance. The faces below him were no longer featureless, but human and friendly and interesting. He did not listen closely to Colonel Wavertree's remarks, which seemed to be mostly about taxation, or to the ex-Premier of New Caledonia, who was heavily rhetorical and passionately imperial. Modest as he was, he had a pleased consciousness that, though he might have talked a good deal of rot, he had gripped his hearers as not even Lamanca had gripped them. He searched through the hall for faces to recognise. Wattie, he saw, savagely content; the Colonel, too, who looked flushed and happy, and Junius, and Agatha. But there was no sign of Janet, and his failure to find her threw a dash of cold water on his triumph.

The next step was to achieve an inconspicuous departure. Lamanca would be escorted in state to the four-forty-five train, and he must join it at Frew. While "God Save the King" was being

sung, Sir Archie escaped by a side-door, followed by an excited agent. "Man, ye went down tremendous," Brodie gasped. "Ye changed your mind—ye told me ye were goin' to deal wi' foreign policy. Anyway, ye've started fine, and there'll be no gettin' inside the hall the next time ye speak in Muirtown."

Archie shook him off, picked up a taxi-cab at the station, and drove to Frew. There, after lurking in the waiting-room, he duly entered a third-class carriage in the rear of the south-going train. At six o'clock he emerged on to the platform at Bridge of Gair, and waited till the train had gone before he followed Lamancha to the hotel. He found his friend thinking only of Haripol. "I had a difficult job to get rid of Claybody, and had to tell a lot of lies. Said I was going to stay with Lanerick and that my man had gone on there with my luggage. We'd better be off, for we've a big day before us to-morrow."

But, as the Hispana started up the road to the pass, Lamancha smiled affectionately on the driver and patted his shoulder. "I've often called you an idiot, Archie, but I'm bound to say to-day you were an inspired idiot. You may win this seat or not—it doesn't matter—but sooner or later you're going to make a howling success in that silly game."

Beyond the pass the skies darkened for rain, and it was in a deluge that the car, a little after eight o'clock, crossed the Bridge of Larrig. Archie had intended to go round by one of the peat-roads, but the wild weather had driven everyone to shelter, and it seemed safe to take the straight road up the

hill. Shapp, who had just arrived in the Ford, took charge of the car, and Archie and Lamancha sprinted through the drizzle to the back-door.

To their surprise it was locked, and when, in reply to their hammering, Mrs Lithgow appeared, it was only after repeated questions through the scullery-window that she was convinced of their identity and permitted them to enter.

"We've been sair fashed wi' folk," was her laconic comment, as she retired hastily to the kitchen after locking the door behind them.

In the smoking-room they found the lamps lit, the windows shuttered, Crossby busy with the newspapers, Palliser-Yeates playing patience, and Leithen as usual deep in the works of Sir Walter Scott. "Well," was the unanimous question, "how did it go off?"

"Not so bad," said Archie. "Charles was in great form. But what on earth has scared Mrs Lithgow?"

Leithen laid down his book. "We've had the devil of a time. Our base has been attacked. It looks as if we may have a rearguard action to add to our troubles. We're practically besieged. Two hours ago I was all for burning our ciphers and retiring."

"Besieged? By whom?"

"By the correspondents. Ever since the early afternoon. I fancy their editors have been prod-ding them with telegrams. Anyhow, they've forgotten all about Harold Blacktooth and are hot on the scent of John Macnab."

"But what brought them here?"

"Method of elimination, I suppose. Your journalist is a sharp fellow. They argued that John

Macnab must have a base near by, and, as it wasn't Strathlarrig or Glenraden, it was most likely here. Also they caught sight of Crossby taking the air, and gave chase. Crossby flung them off—happily they can't have recognised him—but they had him treed in the stable loft for three hours."

"Did they see you?"

"No. Some got into the hall and some glued their faces to this window, but John was under the table and I was making myself very small at the back of the sofa. . . . Mrs. Lithgow handled them like Napoleon. Said the Laird was away and wouldn't be back till midnight, but he'd see them at ten o'clock to-morrow. She had to promise that, for they are determined ruffians. They'd probably still be hanging about the place if it hadn't been for this blessed rain."

"That's not all," put in Palliser-Yeates. "We had a visit from a lunatic. We didn't see him, for Mrs. Lithgow lured him indoors and has him shut up in the wine-cellar."

"Good God! What kind of lunatic?" Sir Archie exclaimed.

"Don't know. Mrs. Lithgow was not communicative. She said something about smallpox. Maybe he's a fellow-sufferer looking for Archie's company. Anyhow, he's in the wine-cellar for Wattie to deal with."

Sir Archie rose and marched from the room, and did not return till the party were seated at a late supper. His air was harassed, and his eyes were wild.

"It wasn't the wine-cellar," he groaned, "it was the coal-hole. He's upstairs now having a bath and

changing into a suit of my clothes. Pretty short in the temper, too, and no wonder. For Heaven's sake, you fellows, stroke him down when he appears. We've got to bank on his being a good chap and tell him everything. It's deuced hard luck. Here am I just making a promising start in my public career, and you've gone and locked up the local Medical Officer of Health who came to inquire into a reputed case of smallpox."

XXXVIII: IN WHICH CRIME IS
ADDED TO CRIME

BY the mercy of Providence Doctor Kello fulfilled Archie's definition of a "good chap." He was a sandy-haired young man from Dundee, who had been in the Air Force, and on his native dialect had grafted the intricate slang of that service. Archie had found him half-choked with coal-dust and wrath, and abject apologies had scarcely mollified him. But a hot bath and his host's insistence that he should spend the night at Crask—Dr. Kello knew very well that at the inn he would get no more than a sofa—had worked a miracle, and he appeared at the supper-table prepared to forgive and forget. He was a little awed by the company in which he found himself, and nervously murmured, "Pleased to meet ye" in response to the various introductions. A good meal and Archie's Veuve Clicquot put him into humour with himself and at ease with his surroundings. He exchanged war reminiscences, and told stories of his professional life—"Ye wouldn't believe, I tell ye, what queer folk the Highlanders are"—and when

later in the evening Archie, speaking as to a brother airman, made a clean breast of the John Macnab affair, he received the confession with obstreperous hilarity. "It's the best stunt I ever heard tell of," he roared, slapping his knee. "Ye may depend on me to back ye up, too. Is it the journalists that's worrying ye? You leave the merchants to me. I'll shut their mouths for them. Ten o'clock to-morrow, is it? Well, I'll be there with a face as long as my arm, and I'll guarantee to send them down the hill like a kirk emptying."

All night it rained in bucketfuls, and the Friday morning broke with the same pitiless deluge. Lamanca came down to breakfast in a suit of clothes which would have been refused by a self-respecting tramp, but which, as a matter of fact, had been his stalking outfit for a dozen years. The Merklands were not a dressy family. He studied the barograph, where the needle was moving ominously downward, and considered the dissolving skies and the mist which rose like a wall beyond the terrace.

"It's no good," he told his host. "You might as well try to stalk Haripol in a snow blizzard. To-day must be washed out, and that leaves us only to-morrow. We'll have to roost indoors, and we're terribly at the mercy of that hive of correspondents."

The hive came at ten, a waterproofed army defying the weather in the cause of duty. But in front of the door they were met by Dr. Kello, with a portentous face.

"Good morning, boys," he said. "Sir Archibald Roylance asked me to see ye on his behalf.

My name's Kello—I'm Medical Officer of Health for this part of the world. I'm very sorry, but ye can't see Sir Archibald this morning. In fact, I want ye to go away and not come near the place at all."

He was promptly asked for his reason.

"The fact is that a suspected case of smallpox has been reported from Crask. That's why I'm here. I say 'suspected,' for, in my own opinion, it's nothing of the sort. But I'm bound to take every precaution, and, for your own sakes, I can't let a manjack of ye a step nearer."

The news was received in silence, and added to the depression of the dripping weather. A question was asked.

"No, it's not Sir Archibald. He's as disappointed as you are at not being able to welcome ye. He says if ye come back in forty-eight hours—that's the time when I hope to give the place a clean bill of health—he would like to stand ye drinks and have a crack with ye."

Five minutes later the doctor returned to the smoking-room. "They're off like good laddies, and I don't think they'll trouble ye for the next two days. Gosh! They're as feared of infectious diseases as a Highlander. I'll give them a wee while to go down the hill, and then I'll start off home on my motor-bike. I'm very much obliged to you gentlemen for your good entertainment. . . . Ye may be sure I'll hold my tongue about the confidence ye've honoured me with. Not a cheep from me! But I can tell ye, I'll be keeping my ears open for word of John Macnab. Good luck to ye, gentlemen!"

The departure of Doctor Kello was followed by the appearance of Wattie Lithgow, accompanied by Benjie, whose waterproof cape of ceremony had now its uses.

"I've got bad news from this laddie," said the former, lugging Benjie forward by the ear. "He was at Haripol early this morning and a' the folk there was speakin' about it. Macnicol tell't him——"

"No, he didna," put in Benjie. "Macnicol's ower prood to speak to me. I heard it frae the men in the bothy and frae ane o' the lassies up at the big hoose."

"Weel, what a'body kens is maistly true. Ye'll no guess what yon auld Claybody is daein'. Ye ken he's a contractor, forbye ither things, and he's got the contrack for makin' the big dam at Kinloch-buie. There's maybe a thousand navvies workin' there, and he's bringin' ower a squad o' them—Benjie says mair nor a hundred—to guaird the forest."

"Ass!" exclaimed Palliser-Yeates. "He'll drive every beast into Caithness."

"Na, na. Macnicol is no entirely wantin' in sense. The navvies will no be allowed inside the forest. They'll be a guaird outside—what's that they ca' it?—an outer barrage. Macnicol will see that a' the deer are in the Sanctuary, and in this kind o' weather it will no be that deeficult. But it will be verra deeficult for his lordship to get inside the forest, and it will be verra near an impossibility to get a beast out."

Archie looked round the room. "Dashed un-sporting I call it. I bet it's the young 'un's idea."

“Look here, Charles,” said Leithen. “Isn’t it about time to consider whether you shouldn’t cry off this Haripol affair? It was different at the start. John and I had a fair sporting chance. Our jobs were steep enough, but yours is absolutely perpendicular. . . . The Claybodys are not taking any chances, and a hundred able-bodied navvies is a different-sized proposition to a few gillies. The confounded Press has blazoned the thing so wide that if you’re caught you’ll be a laughing-stock to the whole civilised world. Don’t you see that you simply can’t afford to lose, any more than the Claybodys? Then, to put the lid on it, our base is under a perpetual threat from those newspaper fellows. I’d rather have all Scotland Yard after me than the Press—you agree, Crossby? I’m inclined to think that John Macnab has done enough *pour chauffer la gloire*. It’s insanity to go on.”

Lamancha shook his head. “It’s all very well for you—you won. I tell you frankly that nothing on earth will prevent me having a try at Haripol. All you say is perfectly true, but I don’t choose to listen to it. This news of Wattie’s only makes me more determined.”

Leithen subsided into his book, observing—“I suppose that is because you’re a great man. You’re a sober enough fellow at most times, but you’re able now and then to fling your hat over the moon. You can damn the consequences, which I suppose is one of the tests of greatness. John and I can’t, but we admire you, and we’ll bail you out.”

It was Sir Archie, strangely enough, who now abetted Lamancha’s obstinacy. “I grant you the odds are stiff,” he declared, “but that only means

that we must find some way to shorten them. Nothing's impossible after yesterday. There was I gibbering with terror and not a notion in my head, and yet I got on fairly well, didn't I, Wattie? "

"Ye made a grand speech, sir. There was some said it was the best speech they ever heard in a' their days. There was one man said ye was haverin', but"—fiercely—"he didna say it twice."

"We've the whole day to make a plan," Archie went on. "Hang it all, there must be some way to diddle the Claybodys. We've got a pretty good notion of the lie of the land, and Wattie's a perfect Red Indian at getting up to deer. We muster four and a half able-bodied men, counting me as half. And there's Benjie. Benjie, you're a demon at strategy. Have you anything to say? "

"Aye," said Benjie, "I've a plan. But ye're ower particular here, and maybe ye wadna like it." This with a dark glance at Palliser-Yeates, who was leaving the room to get more tobacco.

"We'll have it, all the same. Let's sit down to business. Stick the Ordnance map on that table, Charles, and you, Ned, shut that book and give us the benefit of your powerful mind."

Leithen rose, yawning. "I've left my pipe in the dining-room. Wait a moment till I fetch it."

Now Dr. Kello, on his departure, had left the front-door of the house open, and the steady down-pour of rain blanketed all other sounds from outside. So it came to pass that when Archie's quick ear caught the noise of footsteps on the gravel and he bounded into the hall, he was confronted with the spectacle of Colonel Raden and his daughters already across the doorstep. Moreover, as luck

would have it, at that moment Leithen from the dining-room and Palliser-Yeates from his bedroom converged on the same point.

"Hullo, Roylance," the Colonel cried. "This is a heathenish hour for a visit, but we had to have some exercise, and my daughters wanted to come up and congratulate you on your performance yesterday. A magnificent speech, sir! Uncommon good sense! What I——"

But the Colonel stopped short in mystification at the behaviour of his daughters, who were staring with wide eyes at two unknown figures who stood shamefacedly behind Sir Archie. This last, having no alternative, was trying to carry off things with a high hand.

"Let me introduce," he was proclaiming, "Sir Edward Leithen—Mr. Palliser-Yeates—Miss Raden, Miss Janet Raden, Colonel——"

But he was unheeded. Agatha was looking at Leithen and Janet at Palliser-Yeates, and simultaneously the two ejaculated, "John Macnab!"

Archie saw that it was all up. Shouting for Mrs. Lithgow, he helped his visitors to get out of their mackintoshes, and ordered his housekeeper to have these garments dried. Then he ushered them into the smoking-room where were Lamancha and Crossby and Benjie and a good peat-fire. Wattie, at the first sound of voices, had discreetly retired.

"Come along, Colonel, I'll explain. Very glad to see you—have that chair . . . what about dry stockings? . . ."

But his hospitable bustle was unheeded. The Colonel, hopelessly at sea, was bowing to a tall man

who in profound embarrassment was clearing books and papers out of chairs.

"Yes, that's Lord Lamancha. You heard him yesterday. Charles, this is Colonel Raden, and Miss Agatha and Miss Janet. That is Mr. Crossby, the eminent journalist. That little scallywag is Fish Benjie, whom I believe you know. . . . Sit down, please, all of you. We're caught out and are going to confess. Behold the lair of John Macnab."

Colonel Raden was recovering himself.

"I read in the papers," he said, "that John Macnab is the reincarnation of Harald Blacktooth. In that case we are related. With which of these gentlemen have I the honour to claim kin?"

The words, the tone, convinced Sir Archie that the danger was past, and his nervousness fled.

"Properly speaking, you've found three new relatives. There they are. Not bad fellows, though they've been giving me a hectic time. Now *I* retire—shoes off, feet fired, and turned out to grass. Ned, you've a professional gift of exposition. Fire away, and tell the whole story."

Sir Edward Leithen obeyed, and it may be said that the tale lost nothing in his telling. He described the case of three gentlemen, not wholly useless to their country, who had suddenly fallen into ennui. He told of a cure, now perfected, but of a challenge not yet complete. "I've been trying to persuade Lord Lamancha to drop the thing," he said, "but the Claybodys have put his back up, and I'm not sure that I blame him. It didn't matter about you or Bandicott, for you took it like sportsmen, and we should have felt no disgrace in being beaten by you. But Claybody is different."

"By Gad, sir, you are right," the Colonel shouted, rising to his feet and striding about the room. "He and his damned navvies are an insult to every gentleman in the Highlands. They're enough to make Harald Blacktooth rise from the dead. I should never think anything of Lord Lamanca again—and I've thought a devilish lot of him up to now—if he took this lying down. Do you know, sir"—turning to Lamanca—"that I served in the Scots Guards with your father—we called them the Scots Fusilier Guards in those days—and I am not going to fail his son."

Sir Edward Leithen was a philosopher, with an acute sense of the ironies of life, and as he reflected that here was a laird, a Tory, and a strict preserver of game working himself into a passion over the moral rights of the poacher, he suddenly relapsed into helpless mirth. Colonel Raden regarded him sternly and uncomprehendingly, but Janet smiled, for she too had an eye for comedy.

"I'm tremendously grateful to you," Lamanca said. "You know more about stalking than all of us put together, and we want your advice."

"Janet," commanded her parent, "you have the best brain in the family. I'll be obliged if you'll apply it to this problem."

For an hour an anxious conclave surrounded the spread-out Ordnance map. Wattie was summoned, and with a horny forefinger expounded the probable tactics of Macnicol and the presumable disposition of the navy guard. At the end of the consultation Lamanca straightened his back.

"The odds are terribly steep. I can see myself dodging the navvies, and with Wattie's help

getting up to a stag. But if Macnicol and the gillies are perched round the Sanctuary they are morally certain to spot us, and, if we have to bolt, there's no chance of getting the beast over the march. That's a hole I see no way out of."

"Janet," said the Colonel, "do you?"

Janet was looking abstractedly out of the window. "I think it is going to clear up," she observed, disregarding her father's question. "It will be a fine afternoon, and then, if I am any judge of the weather, it will rain cats and dogs in the evening."

"We had better scatter after luncheon," said Lamancha, "and each of us go for a long stride. We want to be in training for to-morrow."

After the Colonel had suggested half a dozen schemes, the boldness of which was only matched by their futility, the Radens rose to go. Janet signalled to Benjie, who slipped out after her, and the two spoke in whispers in the hall, while Archie was collecting the mackintoshes from the kitchen.

"I want you to be at Haripol this afternoon. Wait for me a little on this side of the lodge about half-past three."

Benjie grinned and nodded. "Aye, lady, I'll be there." He, too, had a plan for shortening the odds, and he had so great a respect for Janet's sagacity that he thought it probable that she might have reached his own conclusion.

As Janet had foretold, it was a hot afternoon. The land steamed in the sun, but every hill-top was ominously clouded. While the inhabitants of Crask were engaged in taking stealthy but violent exercise among the sinuosities of Sir Archie's estate,

Janet Raden mounted her yellow pony and rode thoughtfully towards Haripol by way of Inverlarrig and the high road. There were various short-cuts, suitable for a wild cat like Benjie, but after the morning's torrential rains she had no fancy for swollen bogs and streams. She found Benjie lurking behind a boulder near the lodge, and in the shelter of a clump of birches engaged him in earnest conversation. Then she rode decorously through the gates and presented herself at the castle door.

Haripol was immense, new, and, since it had been built by a good architect out of good stone, not without its raw dignity. Janet found Lady Claybody in a Tudor hall which had as much connection with a Scots castle as with a Kaffir kraal. There was a wonderful jumble of possessions—tapestries which included priceless sixteenth-century Flemish pieces, and French fakes of last year; Ming treasures and Munich atrocities; armour of which about a third was genuine; furniture indiscriminately Queen Anne, Sheraton, Jacobean, and Tottenham Court Road; and pictures which ranged from a Sir Joshua (an indifferent specimen) to a recent Royal Academy portrait of Lord Claybody. A feature was the number of electric lamps to illumine the hours of darkness, the supports of which varied from Spanish altar-candlesticks to two stuffed polar bears and a turbaned Ethiopian in coloured porcelain.

Lady Claybody was a heavily handsome woman still in her early fifties. The purchase of Haripol had been her doing, for romance lurked in her ample breast, and she dreamed of a new life in which she should be an unquestioned great lady

far from the compromising environment where the Claybody millions had been won. Her manner corresponded to her ambition, for it was stately and aloof, her speech was careful English seasoned with a few laboriously acquired Scots words, and in her household her wish was law. A merciful tyrant, she rarely resorted to ultimata, but when she issued a decree it was obeyed.

She was unaffectedly glad to see Janet, for the Radens were the sort of people she desired as friends. Two days before she had been at her most urbane to Agatha and the Colonel, and now she welcomed the younger daughter as an ambassador from that older world which she sought to make her own. A small terrier drowned her greetings with epileptic yelps.

"Silence, Roguie," she enjoined. "You must not bark at a fellow-countrywoman. Roguie, you know, is so high-strung that he reacts to any new face. You find me quite alone, my dear. Our daughters do not join us till next week, when we shall have a houseful for the stalking. Now I am having a very quiet, delicious time drinking in the peace of this enchanted glen."

She said no word of John Macnab, who was doubtless the primary cause of this solitude. Lord Claybody and Johnson, it appeared, were out on the hill. Janet chattered on the kind of topics which she felt suitable—hunting in the Midlands, the coming Muirtown Gathering, the political meeting of yesterday. "Claybody thought Sir Archibald Roylance rather extravagant," said the lady, "but he was greatly impressed by Lord Lamanha's speech. Surely it is absurd that this

part of the Highlands, which your sister says was so loyal to Prince Charlie, should be a hot-bed of radicalism. Claybody thinks that that can all be changed, but not with a candidate who truckles to socialist nonsense."

Janet was demure and acquiescent, sighing when her hostess sighed, condemning when she condemned. Presently the hot sun shining through the windows suggested the open air to Lady Claybody, who was dressed for walking.

"Shall we stroll a little before tea?" she asked. "Wee Roguie has been cooped indoors all morning, and he loves a run, for he comes of a very sporting breed."

They set forth accordingly, into gardens bathed in sunshine, and thence to the coolness of beech woods. The Reascuill, after leaving its precipitous glen, flows, like the Raden, for a mile or two in haughlands, which are split by the entry of a tributary, the Doran, which in its upper course is the boundary between Haripol and Crask. Between the two streams stands a wooded knoll which is a chief pleasaunce of the estate. It is a tangle of dwarf birches, bracken and blaeberry, with ancient Scots firs on the summit, and from its winding walks there is a prospect of the high peaks of the forest rising black and jagged above the purple ridges.

At its foot they crossed the road which followed the river into the forest, and Janet caught sight of a group of men lounging by the bridge.

"Have you workmen on the place just now?" she asked.

"Only wood-cutters, I think," said Lady Claybody.

Wee Roguie plunged madly into the undergrowth, and presently could be heard giving tongue, as if in pursuit of a rabbit. "Dear little fellow!" said his mistress. "How he loves freedom!"

The ladies walked slowly to the crest of the knoll, where they halted to admire the view. Janet named the different summits, which looked ominously near, and then turned to gaze on the demesne of Haripol lying green and secure in its cincture of wood and water. "I think you have the most beautiful place in the Highlands," she told her hostess. "It beats Glenraden, for you have the sea."

"It is very lovely," was the answer. "I always think of it as a fortress, where we are defended against the troubles of the world. At Ronham one might as well be living in London, but here there are miles of battlements between us and dull everyday things. . . . Listen to Roguie! How happy he is!"

Roguie's yelps sounded now close at hand, and now far off, as the scent led him. Presently, as the ladies moved back to the house, the sound grew fainter. "He will probably come out on the main avenue," his mistress said. "I like him to feel really free, but he always returns in good time for his little supper."

They had tea in the tapestried hall, and then Janet took her leave. "I want to escape the storm," she explained, "for it is certain to rain hard again before night." As it chanced she did not escape it, but, after a wayside colloquy with a small boy, arrived at Glenraden as wet as if she had

swum the Larrig. She had sent by Benjie a message to Crask, concerning her share in the plans of the morrow.

That night after dinner, while the rain beat on the windows, John Macnab was hard at work. The map was spread out on the table, and Lamancha prepared the orders for the coming action. If we would understand his plan, it is necessary to consider the nature of the terrain. The hill behind Crask rises to a line of small cliffs not unlike a South African *kranz*, and through a gap in the line runs a moorland track which descends by the valley of the Doran till it joins the main road from Inverlarrig almost at Haripol gates. The Doran glen—the Crask march is the stream—is a wide hollow of which the north side is the glacis of the great Haripol peaks. These are, in order from west to east, Stob Ban, Stob Coire Easain, Sgurr Mór, and the superb tower of Sgurr Dearg. Seen from the Crask ridge the summits rise in cones of rock from a glacis which at the foot is heather and scrub and farther up steep slopes of scree and boulders. Between each peak there is a pass leading over to the deep-cut glen of the Reascuill, which glen is contained on the north by the hills of Machray forest.

It was certain that the navy cordon would be an outer line of defence, outside the wilder ground of the forest. Wattie expounded it with an insight which the facts were to justify. “The men will be posted along the north side o’ the Doran, maybe halfway up the hill—syne round the west side o’ Stob Ban and across the Reascuill at the new fir plantin’—syne up the Machray march along the taps o’ Clonlet and Bheinn Fhada. They can leave

out Sgurr Dearg, for ye'd hae to be a craw to get ower that side o't. By my way o' thinkin', they'll want maybe three hundred to mak a proper ring, and they'll want them thickest on the Machray side where the ground is roughest. North o' the Doran it's that bare that twa-three men could see the whole hill-side, and Macnicol's no the ane to waste his folk. The easy road intil the Sanctuary is frae Machray up the Reascuill, and the easy way to get a beast out wad be by way o' the Red Burn. But the navvies will be as thick as starlin's there, so it's no place for you and me, my lord."

The Haripol Sanctuary lay at the headwaters of the Reascuill, between what was called the Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr Dearg and the cliffs of Sgurr Mór. As luck would have it, a fairly easy pass, known generally as the Beallach, led from it to the glen of the Doran. It was clear that Lamancha must enter from the south, and, if he got a stag, remove it by the same road.

"I'll get ye into the Sanctuary, never fear," said Wattie grimly. "There's no a navy ever whelpit wad keep you and me out. But when we're there, God help us, for we'll hae Macnicol to face. And if Providence is mercifu' and we get a beast, we've the navvies to get it through, and that's about the end o't. Ye canna mak yoursel' inconspicuous when ye're pu'in' at a muckle stag."

"True," said Lamancha, "and that's just where Mr. Palliser-Yeates comes in. . . . John, my lad, your job is to be waiting on the Doran side of the Beallach, and, if you see Wattie and me with a beast, to draw off the navvies in that quarter. You had better move west towards Haripol, for there's

better cover on that side. D'you think you can do it? You used to have a pretty gift of speed, and you've always had an uncommon good eye for ground."

Palliser-Yeates said modestly that he thought he was up to the job, provided Lamancha did not attract the prior notice of the watchers. Once the pack got on his trail, he fancied he could occupy their attention for an hour or two. The difficulty lay in keeping Lamancha in view, and for that purpose it would be necessary to ensconce himself at the very top of the Bealach, where he could have a sight of the upper Sanctuary.

To Leithen fell the onerous task of creating a diversion on the other side of the forest. He must start in the small hours and be somewhere on the Machray boundary when Lamancha was beginning operations. There lay the most obvious danger-point, and there the navvies would probably be thickest on the ground. At all costs their attention—and that of any Haripol gillies in the same quarter—must be diverted from what might be happening in the Sanctuary. This was admittedly a hard duty, but Leithen was willing to undertake it. He was not greatly afraid of the navvies, who are a stiff-jointed race, but the Haripol gillies were another matter. "You simply must not get caught," Lamancha told him. "If you're hunted, make a bee-line north to Machray and Glenaicill—the gillies won't be keen to be drawn too far away from Haripol. You won the school mile in your youth, and you're always in training. Hang it all, you ought to be able to keep Claybody's fellows on

the run. I never yet knew a gillie quick on his feet."

"That's a pre-war notion," said Palliser-Yeates. "Some of the young fellows are uncommon spry. Ned may win all right, but it won't be by much of a margin."

The last point for decision was the transport of the stag. The moor-road from Crask was possible for a light car with a high clearance, and it was arranged that Archie should take the Ford by that route, and wait in cover on the Crask side of the Doran. It was a long pull from the Beallach to the stream, but there were tributary ravines where the cover was good—always presuming that Palliser-Yeates had decoyed away the navvy guard.

"Here's the lay-out, then," said Lamanha at last. "Wattie and I get into the Sanctuary as best we can and try for a stag. If we get him, we bring him through the Beallach; John views us and shows himself, and draws off the navvies, whom we assume to be few at that point. Then we drag the beast down to the Doran and sling it into Archie's car. Meanwhile Ned is on the other side of the forest, doing his damndest to keep Macnicol busy. . . . That's about the best we can do, but I needn't point out to you that every minute we're taking the most almighty chances. I may never get a shot. Macnicol may be in full cry after us long before we reach the Beallach. The navvies may refuse to be diverted by John, or may come back before we get near Archie's car. . . . Ned may pipe to heedless ears, or, worse still, he may be nobbled and lugged off to the Haripol dungeons. . . . It's no good looking for trouble before it comes, but I can see

that there's a big bank of it waiting for us. What really frightens me is Macnicol and the gillies at the Sanctuary itself. This weather is in our favour, but even then I don't see how they can miss hearing our shot, and that of course puts the lid on it."

A time-table was drawn up after much discussion. Leithen was to start for Machray at 3 a.m., and be in position about 8. Lamancha and Wattie, about the latter hour, would be attempting to enter the Sanctuary by the Beallach. Palliser-Yeates must be at his post not later than 9, and Archie with the car should reach the Doran by 10. The hour of subsequent happenings depended upon fate; the thing might be over for good or ill by noon, or it might drag on till midnight.

When the last arrangements had been settled Lamancha squared his back against the mantelpiece and looked round on the company.

"Of course we're all blazing idiots—the whole thing is insanity—but we've done the best we can in the way of preparation. The great thing is for each of us to keep his wits about him and use them, for everything may go the opposite way to what we think. There's no 'according to Cocker' in this game."

Archie was wrinkling his brows.

"It's all dashed ingenious, Charles, but do you think you have any real chance?"

"Frankly, I don't," was the answer. "The best we can hope for is to fail without being detected. I think there would be a far-away sporting chance if Macnicol could be tied up. That's what sticks in my gizzard. I don't see how it's possible to

get a shot in the Sanctuary without Macnicol spotting it."

Wattie Lithgow had returned, and caught the last words. He was grinning broadly.

"I'm no positeeve but that Macnicol wull be tied up," he observed. "Benjie's here, and he's brocht something wi' him."

He paused for effect.

"It's a dog—a wee, yelpin' dog."

"Whose dog?"

"Leddy Claybody's. It seems that at Haripol her leddyship wears the breeks—that the grey mear is the better horse there—and it seems that she's fair besottit on that dog. Benjie was sayin' that if it was lost Macnicol and a'body about the place wad be set lookin' for't, and naething wad be thought of at Haripol till it was fund."

Archie rose in consternation.

"D'ye mean to say—— How on earth did the beast come here?"

"It cam here wi' Benjie. It's fine and comfortable in a box in the stable. . . . I'm no just clear about what happened afore that, but I think Miss Janet Raden and Benjie gae'd ower to Haripol this afternoon and fund the puir wee beast lost in the wuds."

Archie did not join in the laughter. His mind held no other emotion than a vast and delighted amazement. The lady who two days before had striven to lift his life to a higher plane, who had been the sole inspiration of his successful speech of yesterday, was now discovered conspiring with Fish Benjie to steal a pup.

XXXIX: HARIPOL—THE MAIN ATTACK

SOME men begin the day with loose sinews and a sluggish mind, and only acquire impetus as the hours proceed; others show a declining scale from the vigour of the dawn to the laxity of evening. It was fortunate for Lamancha that he belonged to the latter school. At daybreak he was obstinate, energetic, and frequently ill-tempered, as sundry colleagues in France and Palestine had learned to their cost; and it needed an obstinate man to leave Crask between the hours of five and six in the morning on an enterprise so wild and in weather so lamentable. For the rain came down in sheets and a wind from the north-east put ice into it. He stopped for a moment on the summit of the Crask ridge, to contemplate a wall of driving mist where should have been a vista of the Haripol peaks. "This wund will draw beasts intil the Sanctuary without any help from Macnicol," said Wattie morosely. "It's ower fierce to last. I wager it will be clear long afore night."

"It's the weather we want," said Lamancha, cowering from the violence of the blast.

"For the Sanctuary—maybe. Up till then I'm no sae sure. It's that thick we micht maybe walk intil a navvy's airms."

The gods of the sky were in a capricious mood. All down the Crask hill-side to the edge of the Doran the wet table-cloth of the fog clung to every ridge and hollow. The stream was in roaring spate, and Lamancha and Wattie, already soaked to the skin, forded it knee-high. They had by this time crossed the moor-road from Crask to Haripol,

and marked the nook where in the lee of rocks and birches Archie was to be waiting with the Ford car. Beyond lay the long lift of land to the Haripol peaks. It was rough with boulders and heather, and broken with small gullies, and on its tangled face a man might readily lose himself. Wattie disliked the mist solely because it prevented him from locating the watchers, since his experience of life made him disinclined to leave anything to chance ; but he had no trouble in finding his way in it. The consequence was that he took Lamancha over the glacis at the pace of a Gurkha, and in half an hour from the Doran's edge had him panting among the screes just under the Beallach which led to the Sanctuary. Somewhere behind them were the vain navvy pickets, happily evaded in the fog.

Then suddenly the weather changed. The wind shifted a point to the east, the mist furled up, the rain ceased, and a world was revealed from which all colour had been washed, a world as bleak and raw as at its first creation. The grey screes sweated grey water, the sodden herbage was bleached like winter, the crags towering above them might have been of coal. A small fine rain still fell, but the visibility was now good enough to show them the ground behind them in the style of a muddy etching.

The consequence of this revelation was that Wattie shuffled into cover. He studied the hill-side behind him long and patiently with his glass. Then he grunted : " There's four navvies, as I mak out, but no verra well posted. We cam gey near ane o' them on the road up. Na, they canna see us

here, and besides they're no lookin' this airt." Lamancha tried to find them with his telescope, but could see nothing human in the wide sopping wilderness.

Wattie grumbled as he led the way up a kind of *nullah*, usually as dry as Arabia but now spouting a thousand rivulets, right into the throat of the Beallach. "It's clearin' just when we wanted it thick. The ways o' Providence is mysterious. . . . Na, na, there's nae road there. That's a fox's track, and it's the deers' road we maun gang. Stags will no climb rocks, sensible beasts. . . . The wind's gone, but I wish the mist wad come down again."

At the top of the pass was a pad of flat ground, covered thick with the leaves of cloudberryes. On the right rose the Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr Dearg, in its beginning an easy scramble which gave no hint of the awesome towers which later awaited the traveller; on the left Sgurr Mór ran up in a steep face of screes. "Keep down," Wattie enjoined, and crawled forward to where two boulders made a kind of window for a view to the north.

The two looked down into three little corries which, like the fingers of a hand, united in the palm of a larger corrie, which was the upper glen of the Reascuill. It was a sanctuary perfectly fashioned by nature, for the big corrie was cut off from the lower glen by a line of boiler-plates like the wall of a great dam, down which the stream plunged in cascades. The whole place was loud with water—the distant roar of the main river, the ceaseless dripping of the cliffs, the chatter and babble of a myriad hidden rivulets. But the noise

seemed only to deepen the secrecy. It was a world in monochrome, every detail clear as a wet pebble, but nowhere brightness or colour. Even the coats of the deer had taken on the dead grey of the slaty crags.

Never in his life had Lamancha seen so many beasts together. Each corrie was full of them, feeding on the rough pastures or among the boulders, drifting aimlessly across the spouts of screes below the high cliffs, sheltering in the rushy gullies. There were groups of hinds and calves, and knots of stags, and lone beasts on knolls or in mud-baths, and, since all were restless, the numbers in each corrie were constantly changing.

"Ye gods, what a sight!" Lamancha murmured, his head at Wattie's elbow. "We won't fail for lack of beasts."

"The trouble is," said Wattie, "that there's ower mony." Then he added obscurely that "it might be the day o' Pentecost."

Lamancha was busy with his glass. Just below him, not three hundred yards off, where the ravine which ran from the Beallach opened out into the nearest corrie, there was a group of deer—three hinds, a little stag, and farther on a second stag of which only the head could be seen.

"Wattie," he whispered excitedly, "there's a beast down there—a shootable beast. It's just what we're looking for . . . close to the Beallach."

"Aye, I see it," was the answer. "And I see something mair. There's a man ayont the big corrie—d'ye see yon rock shapit like a puddock-stool? . . . Na, the south side o' the waterfall. . . .

Well, follow on frae there towards Bheinn Fhada—have ye got him? ”

“ Is that a man? ” asked the surprised Lamancha.

“ Where’s your een, my lord? It’s a man wi’ grey breeks and a brown jaicket—an’ he’s smokin’ a pipe. Aye, it’s Macqueen. I ken by the lang legs o’ him.”

“ Is he a Haripol gillie? ”

“ He’s the second stalker. He’s under notice, for him and young Mr. Claybody doesna agree. Macqueen comes frae the Lawlands, and has a verra shairp tongue. They was oot on the hill last week, and Mr. Johnson was pechin’ sair gaun up the braes, an’ no wonder, puir man. He cries on Macqueen to gang slow, and says, apologetic-like, ‘ Ye see, Macqueen, I’ve been workin’ terrible hard the past year, and it’s damaged my wund.’ Macqueen, who canna bide the sight of him, says, ‘ I’m glad to hear it, sir. I was feared it was maybe the drink.’ Gey impident! ”

“ Shocking.”

“ Weel, he’s workin’ off his notice. . . . I’m pleased to see him yonder, for it means that Macnicol will no be there. Macnicol ”—Wattie chuckled like a dropsical corncrake—“ is maist likely beatin’ the roddydendrums for the wee dog. Macqueen is set there so as he can watch this Beallach and likewise the top of the Red Burn on the Machray side, which I was tellin’ ye was the easiest road. If ye were to kill that stag doun below he could baith see ye and hear ye, and ye’d never be allowed to shift it a yaird. . . . Na, na. Seein’ Macqueen’s where he is, we maun try

the wee corrie right under Sgurr Dearg. He canna see into that."

"But we'll never get there through all those deer."

"It will not be easy."

"And if we get a stag we'll never be able to get it over this Beallach."

"Indeed it will take a great deal of time. Maybe a' nicht. But I'll no say it's not possible. . . . Anyway, it is the best plan. We will have to tak a lang cast roond, and we maunna forget Macqueen. I'd give a five-pun-note for anither blatter o' rain."

The next hour was one of the severest bodily trials which Lamancha had ever known. Wattie led him up a chimney of Sgurr Mór, the depth of which made it safe from observation, and down another on the north face, also deep, and horribly loose and wet. This brought them to the floor of the first corrie at a point below where the deer had been observed. The next step was to cross the corrie eastward towards Sgurr Dearg. This was a matter of high delicacy—first because of the number of deer, second because it was all within view of Macqueen's watch-tower.

Lamancha had followed in his time many stalkers, but he had never seen an artist who approached Wattie in skill. The place was littered with hinds and calves and stags, the cover was patchy at the best, and the beasts were restless. Wherever a route seemed plain the large ears and spindle shanks of a hind appeared to block it. Had he been alone Lamancha would either have sent every beast streaming before him in full sight of

Macqueen, or he would have advanced at the rate of one yard an hour. But Wattie managed to move both circumspectly and swiftly. He seemed to know by instinct when a hind could be bluffed and when her suspicions must be laboriously quieted. The two went for the most part on their bellies like serpents, but their lowliness of movement would have been of no avail had not Wattie, by his sense of the subtle eddies of air, been able to shape a course which prevented their wind from shifting deer behind them. He well knew that any movement of beasts in any quarter would bring Macqueen's vigilant glasses into use.

Their task was not so hard so long as they were in hollows on the corrie floor. The danger came in crossing the low ridge to that farther corrie which was beyond Macqueen's ken, for, as they ascended, the wind was almost bound to carry their scent to the deer through which they had passed. Wattie lay long with his chin in the mire and his eyes scanning the ridge till he made up his mind on his route. Obviously it was the choice of the least among several evils, for he shook his head and frowned.

The ascent of the ridge was a slow business, and toilful. Wattie was clearly following an elaborate plan, for he zigzagged preposterously, and would wait long for no apparent reason in places where Lamancha was held precariously by half a foothold and the pressure of his nails. Anxious glances were cast over his shoulder at the post where Macqueen was presumably on duty. The stalker's ear seemed of an uncanny keenness, for he would listen hard, hear something, and then utterly change his course.

To Lamancha it was all inexplicable, for there appeared to be no deer on the ridge, and the place was so much in the lee that not a breath of wind seemed to be abroad to carry their scent. Hard as his condition was, he grew furiously warm and thirsty, and perhaps a little careless, for once or twice he let earth and stones slip under his feet.

Wattie turned on him fiercely. "Gang as if ye was something growin'," he whispered. "There's beasts on a' sides."

Sobered thereby, Lamancha mended his ways, and kept his thoughts rigidly on the job before him. He crept docilely in Wattie's prints, wondering why on a little ridge they should go through exertions that must be equivalent to the ascent of the Matterhorn. At last his guide stopped. "Put your head between thae rashes," he enjoined. "Ye'll see her."

"See what?" Lamancha gasped.

"That dour deevil o' a hind."

There she was, a grey elderly beldame, with her wicked puck-like ears, aware and suspicious, not five yards off.

"We canna wait," Wattie hissed. "It's ower dangerous. Bide you here like a stone."

He wriggled away to his right, while Lamancha, hanging on a heather root, watched the twitching ears and wrinkled nozzle. . . . Presently from farther up the hill came a sharp bark, which was almost a bleat. The hind flung up her head and gazed intently. . . . Five minutes later the sound was repeated, this time from a lower altitude. The beast sniffed, shook herself, and stamped with

her foot. Then she laid back her ears and trotted quietly over the crest.

Wattie was back again by Lamancha's side. "That puzzled the auld bitch," was his only comment. "We can gang faster now, and God kens we've nae time to loss."

As Lamancha lay panting at last on the top of the ridge, he looked down into the highest of the lesser corries, tucked right under the black cliffs of Sgurr Dearg. It was a little corrie, very steep, and threaded by a burn which after the rain was white like a snow-drift. Vast tumbled masses of stone, ancient rock-falls from the mountain, lay thick as the cottages in a hamlet. At first sight the place seemed to be without deer. Lamancha, scanning it with his glass, could detect no living thing among the debris.

Wattie was calling fiercely on his Maker.

"God, it's the auld hero," he muttered, his eyes glued to his telescope.

At last Lamancha got his glass adjusted, and saw what his companion saw. Far up the corrie, on a patch of herbage—the last before the desert of the rocks began—stood three stags. Two were ordinary beasts, shootable, for they must have weighed sixteen or seventeen stone, but with inconsiderable heads. The third was no heavier, but he had a head like a blasted pine—going back fast, for the beast was old, but still with thirteen clearly marked points and a most noble spread of horn.

"It's him," Wattie crooned. "It's the auld hero. Fine I ken him, for I seen him on Crask last back-end rivin' at the stacks. There's no a forest hereaways but they've had a try for him, but the

deil's in him, for the grandest shots aye miss. What's your will, my lord? Dod, if John Macnab gets yon lad, he can cock his bonnet?"

Lamanca felt his heart beat faster.

"I don't know, Wattie. Is it fair to kill the best beast in the forest?"

"Keep your mind easy about that. Yon's no a Haripol beast. He's oftener on Crask than on Haripol. He's a traiveller, and in one season will cover the feck o' the Hielands. I've heard that oreeginally he cam oot o' Kintail. He's terrible auld—some says a hundred year—and if ye dinna kill him he'll perish next winter, belike, in a snaw-wreath, and that's a puir death to dee."

"It's a terrible pull to the Beallach."

"It will be that, but there's the nicht afore us. If we don't take that beast—or one o' the three—I doubt we'll no get anither chance."

"Push on then, Wattie. It looks like a clear coast."

"I'm no so sure. There's that deevil o' a hind somewhere afore us."

Down through the gaps of the Pinnacle Ridge blew fine streamers of mist. They were the precursors of a new storm, for long before the two men had wormed their way into the corrie the mountain before them was blotted out with a curtain of rain, and the wind, which seemed for a time to have died away, was sounding a thousand notes in the Pan's-pipes of the crags.

"Good," said Lamancha. "This will blanket the shot."

"Ba-ad too," growled Wattie, "for we'll be duntin' against the auld bitch."

Lamancha believed he had located the stags well enough to go to them in black darkness. You had only to follow the stream to its head, and they were on the left bank a hundred yards or so from the rocks. But when he reached the burn he found that his memory was useless. There was not one stream but dozens, and it was hard to say which was the main channel. It was a loud world again, very different from the first corrie, but, when he would have hastened, Wattie insisted on circumspection. "There's the hind," he said, "and maybe some sma' stags. It's early in the day, man, and since we're out o' Macqueen's sight there's nae need to hurry."

His caution was justified. As they drew themselves up the side of a small cascade the tops of a pair of antlers were seen over the next rise. Lamancha thought they were those of one of the three stags, but Wattie disillusioned him. "We're no within six hundred yards o' yon beasts," he said.

A long circuit was necessary, happily in good cover, and the stream was not rejoined till at a point where its channels bore to the south, so that their wind would not be carried to the beasts below the knoll. After that it seemed advisable to Wattie to keep to the water, which was flowing in a deep-cut bed. It was a job for a merman rather than breeched human beings, for Wattie would permit of no rising to a horizontal or even to a kneeling position. The burn entered at their collars and flowed steadily through their shirts to an exit at their knees. Never had men been so comprehensively and continuously wet. Lamancha's right arm ached with pulling the rifle along

the bank—he always insisted on carrying his weapon himself—while his body was submerged in the icy outflow of Sgurr Dearg's springs.

The pressure of Wattie's foot in his face halted him. Blinking through the spray, he saw his leader's head raised stiffly to the alert in the direction of a little knoll. Even in the thick weather he could detect a pair of bat-like ears, and he realised that these ears were twitching. It did not need Wattie's whisper of "the auld bitch" to reveal the enemy.

The two lay in the current for what seemed to Lamancha at least half an hour. He had enough hill-craft to recognise that their one hope was to stick to the channel, for only thus was there a chance of their presence being unrevealed by the wind. But the channel led them very close to the hind. If the brute chose to turn her foolish head they would be within view.

With desperate slowness, an inch at a time, Wattie moved upwards. He signed to Lamancha to wait while he traversed a pool where only his cap and nose showed above the water. Then came a peat wallow, when his face seemed to be ground into the moss, and his limbs to be splayed like a frog's and to move with frog-like jerks. After that was a little cascade, and, beyond, the shelter of a big boulder which would get him out of the hind's orbit. Lamancha watched this strange progress with one eye; the other was on the twitching ears. Mercifully all went well, and Wattie's stern disappeared round a corner of rock.

He laboured to follow with the same precision.

The pool was easy enough except for the trailing of the rifle. The peat was straightforward going, though in his desire to follow his leader's example he dipped his face so deep in the black slime that his nostrils were plugged with it, and some got into his eyes which he dared not try to remove. But the waterfall was a snag. It was no light task to draw himself up against the weight of descending water, and at the top he lay panting for a second, damming up the flow with his body. . . . Then he moved on ; but the mischief had been done.

For the sound of the release of the pent-up stream had struck a foreign note on the hind's ear. It was an unfamiliar noise among the many familiar ones which at the moment filled the corrie. She turned her head sharply, and saw something in the burn which she did not quite understand. Laman-cha, aware of her scrutiny, lay choking, with the water running into his nose ; but the alarm had been given. The hind turned her head, and trotted off up-wind.

The next he knew was Wattie at his elbow making wild signals to him to rise and follow. Cramped and staggering, he lumbered after him away from the stream into a moraine of great granite blocks. " We're no twa hundred yards from the stags," the guide whispered. " The auld bitch will move them, but please God we'll get a shot." As Laman-cha ran he marvelled at Wattie's skill, for he himself had not a notion where in the wide world the beasts might be.

They raced to a knoll, and Wattie flung himself flat on the top.

"There," he cried. "Steady, man. Tak the nearest. A hundred yards. Nae mair."

Lamanca saw through the drizzle three stags moving at a gentle trot to the south—up-wind, for in the corrie the eddies were coming oddly. They were not really startled, but the hind had stirred them. The big stag was in the centre of the three, and the proper shot was the last—a reasonable broadside.

Wattie's advice had been due to his loyalty to John Macnab, and not to his own choice, and this Lamancha knew. The desire of the great stag was on him, as it was on the hunter in Homer, and he refused to be content with the second-best. It was not an easy shot in that bad light, and it is probable that he would have missed; but suddenly Wattie gave an unearthly bark, and for a second the three beasts slowed down and turned their heads towards the sound.

In that second Lamancha fired. The great head seemed to bow itself, and then fling upwards, and all three disappeared at a gallop into the mist.

"A damned poor tailoring shot!" Lamancha groaned.

"He's deid for all that, but God kens how far he'll run afore he drops. He's hit in the neck, but a wee thing ower low. . . . We can bide here a while and eat our piece. If ye wasna John Macnab I could be wishin' we had brought a dog."

Lamanca, cold, wet, and disgusted, wolfed his sandwiches, had a stiff dram from his flask, and smoked a pipe before he started again. He cursed his marksmanship, and Wattie forbore to contradict him; doubtless Jim Tarras had accustomed

him to a standard of skill from which this was a woeful declension. Nor would he hold out much hope. "He'll gang into the first corrie and when he finds the wund different there he'll turn back for the Reascuill. If this was our ain forest and the weather wasna that thick, we might get another chance at him there. . . . Oh, aye, he might gang for ten mile. The mist is a good thing, for Macqueen will no see what's happenin', but if it was to lift, and he saw a' the stags in the corrie movin', you and me wad hae to find a hidy-hole till the dark. . . . Are ye ready, my lord?"

They crossed the ridge which separated them from the first corrie, close to the point where it took off from the *massif* of Sgurr Dearg. It was a shorter road than the one they had come by, and they could take it safely, for they were now moving up-wind, owing to the curious eddy from the south. Over the ridge it would be a different matter, for there the wind would be easterly as before. But it was a stiff climb and a slow business, for they had to make sure that they were on the track of the stag.

Wattie trailed the blood-marks like an Indian, noticing splashes on stones and rushes which Lamancha would have missed. "He's sair hit," he observed at one point. "See! He tried that steep bit and couldna manage it. There's the mark o' his feet turnin'. . . . He's stoppit here. . . . Aye, here's his trail, and it'll be the best for you and me. There's nothing like a wounded beast for pickin' the easiest road."

On the crest the air stirred freely, and, as it seemed to Lamancha, with a new chill. Wattie

gave a grunt of satisfaction, and sniffed it like a pointer dog. He moistened his finger and held it up; then he plucked some light grasses and tossed them into the air.

"That's a mercifu' dispensation! Maybe that shot that ye think ye bauchled was the most providential shot ye ever fired. . . . The wund is shiftin'. I looked for it afore night, but no that early in the day. It's wearin' round to the south. D'ye see what that means?"

Lamancha shook his head. Disgust had made his wits dull.

"Yon beast, as I telled ye, is a traiveller. There's nothing to keep him in Haripol forest. But he'll no leave it unless the wund will let him. Now it looks as if Providence was kind to us. The wund's blawin' from the Beallach, and he's bound to gang up-wund."

The next half-hour was a period of swift drama. Sure enough, the blood-marks turned up the first corrie in the direction from which the two had come in the morning. As the ravine narrowed the stag had evidently taken to the burn, for there were splashes on the rocks and a tinge of red in the pools.

"He's no far off," Wattie croaked. "See, man, he's verra near done. He's slippin' sair."

And then, as they mounted, they came on a little pool where the water was dammed as if by a landslip. There, his body half under the cascade, lay the stag, stone dead, his great horns parting the fall like a pine swept down by a winter spate.

The two regarded him in silence, till Wattie was moved to pronounce his epitaph.

"It's yersel, ye auld hero, and ye've come by a

grand end. Ye've had a braw life traivellin' the hills, and ye've been a braw beast, and the fame o' ye gaed through a' the country-side. Ye micht have dwined away in the cauld winter and dee'd in the wame o' a snaw-drift. Or ye micht have been massacred by ane o' thae Haripol sumphs wi' ten bullets in the big bag. But ye've been killed clean and straucht by John Macnab, and that is a gentleman's death, whatever."

"That's all very well," said Lamancha, "but you know I tailored the shot."

"Ye're a fule," cried the rapt Wattie. "Ye did no siccan thing. It was a verra deeficult shot, and ye put it deid in the only place ye could see. I will not have seen many better shots at all, at all."

"What about the gralloch?" Lamancha asked.

"No here. If the mist lifted Macqueen micht see us. It's no fifty yards to the top o' the Beallach and we'll find a place there for the job."

Wattie produced two ropes and bound the fore-feet and the hind-feet together. Then he rapidly climbed to the summit, and reported on his return that the mist was thick there, and that there were no tracks except their own of the morning. It was a weary business dragging the carcass up a nearly perpendicular slope. First with difficulty they raised it out of the burn channel, and then drew it along the steep hill-side. They had to go a long way up the hill-side to avoid the rock curtain on the edge of the Beallach, but eventually the top was reached, and the stag was deposited behind some boulders on the left of the flat ground. Here, even if the mist lifted, they would be hid from the

sight of Macqueen, and from any sentries there might be on the Crask side.

Wattie flung off his coat and proceeded with gusto to his gory task. The ravens, which had been following them for the past hour, came nearer and croaked encouragement from the ledges of Sgurr Dearg and Sgurr Mór. Wattie was in high spirits, for he whistled softly at his work ; but Lamancha, after his first moment of satisfaction, was restless with anxiety. He had still to get his trophy out of the forest, and there seemed many chances of a slip between his lips and that cup. He was impatient for Wattie to finish, for the air seemed to him lightening. An ominous brightness was flushing the mist towards the south, and the rain had declined to the thinnest of drizzles. He told Wattie his fears.

"Aye, it'll be a fine afternoon. I foresaw that, but that's maybe not a bad thing, now that we're out o' Macqueen's sight."

Wattie completed his job, and hid the horrid signs below a pile of sods and stones. 'Nae *poch-a-bhuie* for me the day," he grinned. "I've other things to think o' besides my supper." He wiped his arms and hands in the wet heather and put on his coat. Then he produced a short pipe, and, as he turned away to light it, a figure suddenly stood beside Lamancha and made his heart jump.

"My hat!" said Palliser-Yeates, "what a head! That must be about a record for Wester Ross. I never got anything as good myself. You're a lucky devil, Charles."

"Call me lucky when the beast is safe at Crask. What about your side of the hill?"

"Pretty quiet. I've been here for hours and hours, wondering where on earth you two had got to. . . . There's four fellows stuck at intervals along the hill-side, and I shouldn't take them to be very active citizens. But there's a fifth who does sentry-go, and I don't fancy the look of him so much. Looks a keen chap, and spry on his legs. What's the orders for me? The place has been playing hide-and-seek, and half the time I've been sitting coughing in a wet blanket. If it stays thick I suppose my part is off."

Wattie, stirred again into fierce life, peered into the thinning fog.

"Damn! The mist's liftin'. I'll get the beast ower the first screes afore it's clear, and once I'm in the burn I'll wait for ye. I can manage the first bit fine mysel'—I could manage it a', if there was nae hurry. . . . Bide you here till I'm weel startit, for I don't like the news o' that wanderin' navy. And you, sir"—this to Palliser-Yeates—"be ready to show yourself down the hill-side as soon as it's clear enough for the folk to see ye. Keep well to the west, and draw them off towards Haripol. There's a man posted near the burn, but he's the farthest east o' them, and for God's sake keep them to the west o' me and the stag. Ye're an auld hand at the job, and should have nae deeficulty in ficklin' a when heavy-fitted navvies. Is Sir Erchibald there wi' the cawr?"

"I suppose so. The time he was due the fog was thick. I couldn't pick him up from here with the glass when the weather cleared, but that's as it should be, for the place he selected was absolutely hidden from this side."

"Well, good luck to us a'." Wattie tossed off a dram from the socket of Lamancha's flask, and, dragging the stag by the horns, disappeared in two seconds from sight.

"I'll be off, Charles," said Palliser-Yeates, "for I'd better get down-hill and down the glen before I start." He paused to stare at his friend. "By Gad, you do look a proper blackguard. Do you realise that you've a face like a nigger and a two-foot rent in your bags? It would be good for Johnson Claybody's soul to see you!"

XL: HARIPOL—TRANSPORT

IT may be doubted whether in clear weather Sir Archie could ever have reached his station unobserved by the watchers on the hill. The place was cunningly chosen, for the road, as it approached the Doran, ran in the lee of a long covert of birch and hazel, so that for the better part of a mile no car on it could be seen from beyond the stream, even from the highest ground. But as the car descended from the Crask ridge it would have been apparent to the sentinels, and its non-appearance beyond the covert would have bred suspicion. As it was the clear spell had gone before it topped the hill, for Sir Archie was more than an hour behind the scheduled time.

This was Janet's doing. She had started off betimes on the yellow pony for Crask, intending to take the by-way from the Larrig side, but before she reached the Bridge of Larrig she had scented danger. One of the correspondents, halted by the roadside with a motor bicycle, accosted her with

great politeness and begged a word. She was Miss Raden, wasn't she? and therefore she knew all about John Macnab. He had heard gossip in the glen of the coming raid on Haripol, and understood that this was the day. Would Miss Raden advise him from her knowledge of the country-side? Was it possible to find some coign of vantage from which he might see the fun?

Janet stuck to the simple truth. She had heard the same story, she admitted, but Haripol was a gigantic and precipitous forest, and it was preserved with a nicety unparalleled in her experience. To go to Haripol in the hope of finding John Macnab would be like a casual visit to England on the chance of meeting the King. She advised him to go to Haripol in the evening. "If anything has happened there," she said, "you will hear about it from the gillies. They'll either be triumphant or savage, and in either case they'll talk."

"We've got to get a story, Miss Raden," the correspondent observed dismally, "and in this roomy place it's like looking for a needle in a hay-field. What sort of people are the Claybodys?"

"You won't get anything from them," Janet laughed. "Take my advice and wait till the evening."

When he was out of sight she turned her pony up the hill and arrived at Crask with an anxious face. "If these people are on the loose all day," she told Sir Archie, "they're bound to spoil sport. They may stumble on our car, or they may see more of Mr. Palliser-Yeates's doings than we want. Can nothing be done? What about Mr. Crossby?"

Crossby was called into consultation and admitted the gravity of the danger. When his help was demanded, he hesitated. "Of course I know most of them, and they know me, and they're a very decent lot of fellows. But they're professional men, and I don't see myself taking on the job of gulling them. *Esprit de corps*, you know. . . . No, they don't suspect me. They probably think I left the place after I got off the Strathlarrig fish scoop, and that I don't know anything about the Haripol business. I daresay they'd be glad enough to see me if I turned up . . . I might link on to them and go with them to Haripol and keep them in a safe place."

"That's the plan," said Archie. "You march them off to Haripol—say you know the ground—which you do a long sight better than they. Some of the gillies will be hunting the home woods for Lady Claybody's pup. Get them mixed up in that show. It will all help to damage Macnicol's temper, and he's the chap we're most afraid of. . . . Besides, you might turn up handy in a crisis. Supposin' Ned Leithen—or old John—has a hard run at the finish you might confuse the pursuit. . . . That's the game, Crossby my lad, and you're the man to play it."

It was after eleven o'clock before the Ford car, having slipped over the pass from Crask in driving sleet, came to a stand in the screen of birches with the mist wrapping the world so close that the foaming Doran six yards away was only to be recognised by its voice. All the way there Sir Archie had been full of forebodings.

"We're giving too much weight away, Miss

Janet," he croaked. "All we've got on our side is this putrid weather. That's a bit of luck, I admit. Also we've two of the most compromising objects on earth, Fish Benjie and that little brute Roguie. . . . Claybody has a hundred navvies, and a pack of gillies, and every beast will be in the Sanctuary, which is as good as inside a barb-wire fence. . . . The thing's too ridiculous. We've got to sit in this car and watch an eminent British statesman being hoofed off the hill, while old John tries to play the decoy-duck, and Ned Leithen, miles off, is hopping like a he-goat on the mountains. . . . It's pretty well bound to end in disaster. One of them will be nobbled—probably all three—and when young Claybody asks, 'Wherefore this outrage?' I don't see what the cowering culprit is going to answer and say unto him."

But when the car stopped in the drip of the birches, and Archie had leisure to look at the girl by his side, he began to think less of impending perils. The place was loud with wind and water, and yet curiously silent. The mist had drawn so close that the two seemed to be shut into a fantastic, secret world of their own. Janet was wearing breeches and a long riding-coat covered by a grey oilskin, the buttoned collar of which framed her small face. Her bright hair, dabbled with raindrops, was battened down under an ancient felt hat. She looked, thought Sir Archie, like an adorable boy. Also for the last half-hour she had been silent.

"You have never spoken to me about your speech," she said at last, looking away from him.

"Yours, you mean," he said. "I only repeated what you said that afternoon on Carnmore. But you didn't hear it. I looked for you everywhere in the hall, and I saw your father and your sister and Bandicott, but I couldn't see you."

"I was there. Did you think I could have missed it? But I was too nervous to sit with the others, so I found a corner at the back below the gallery. I was quite near Wattie Lithgow."

Archie's heart fluttered. "That was uncommon kind. I don't see why you should have worried about that—I mean I'm jolly grateful. I was just going to play the ass of all creation when I remembered what you had said—and—well, I made a speech instead of repeating the rigmarole I had written. I owe everything to you, for, you see, you started me out—I can never feel just that kind of funk again. . . . Charles thinks I might be some use in politics. . . . But I can tell you when I sat down and hunted through the hall and couldn't see you it took all the guilt off the gingerbread."

"I was gibbering with fright," said the girl, "when I thought you were going to stick. If Wattie hadn't shouted out, I think I would have done it myself."

After that silence fell. The rain poured from the trees on to the cover of the Ford, and from the cover sheets of water cascaded to the drenched heather. Wet blasts scourged the occupants and whipped a high colour into their faces. Janet arose and got out.

"We may as well be properly wet," she said. "If they get the stag as far as the Doran, they

must find some way across. There's none at present. Hadn't we better build a bridge?"

The stream, in ordinary weather a wide channel of stones where a slender current fell in amber pools, was now a torrent four yards wide. But it was a deceptive torrent with more noise than strength, and save in the pools was only a foot or two deep. There were many places where a stag could have been easily lugged through by an able-bodied man. But the bridge-building proposal was welcomed, since it provided relief for both from an atmosphere which had suddenly become heavily charged. At a point where the channel narrowed between two blaeberry-thatched rocks it was possible to make an inclined bridge from one bank to the other. The materials were there in the shape of sundry larch-poles brought from the lower woods for the repair of a bridge on the Crask road. Archie dragged half a dozen to the edge and pushed them across. Then Janet marched through the water, which ran close to the top of her riding-boots, and prepared the abutment on the farther shore, weighting the poles down with sods broken from an adjacent bank.

"I'm coming over," she cried. "If it will bear a stag, it will bear me."

"No, you're not," Archie commanded. "I'll come to you."

"The last time I saw you cross a stream you fell in," she reminded him.

Archie tested the contrivance, but it showed an ugly inclination to behave like a see-saw, being insufficiently weighted on Janet's side.

"Wait a moment. We need more turf," and she

disappeared from sight beyond a knoll. When she returned she was excessively muddy as to hands and garments.

"I slipped in that beastly peat-moss," she explained. "I never saw such hags, and there's no turf to be got except with a spade. . . . No, you don't! Keep off that bridge, please. It isn't nearly safe yet. I'm going to roll down stones."

Roll down stones she did till she had erected something very much like a cairn at her end, which would have opposed a considerable barrier to the passage of any stag. Then she announced that she must get clean, and went a few yards down-stream to one of the open shallows, where she proceeded to make a toilet. She stood with the current flowing almost to her knees, suffering it to wash the peat from her boots and the skirts of her oilskin, and at the same time scrubbing her grimy hands. In the process her hat became loose, dropped into the stream, and was clutched with one hand, while with the other she restrained the efforts of the wind to uncoil her shining curls.

It was while watching the moving waters at this priest-like task that crisis came upon Sir Archie. In a blinding second he realised with the uttermost certainty that he had found his mate. He had known it before, but now came the flash of supreme conviction. . . . For swelling bosoms and pouting lips and soft curves and languishing eyes Archie had only the most distant regard. He saluted them respectfully and passed by on the other side of the road—they did not belong to his world. But that slender figure splashing in the tawny eddies made a different appeal. Most women in such a posture

would have looked tousled and flimsy, creatures ill at ease, with their careful allure beaten out of them by weather. But this girl was an authentic creature of the hills and winds—her young slimness bent tensely against the current, her exquisite head and figure made more fine and delicate by the conflict. It is a sad commentary on the young man's education, but, while his soul was bubbling with poetry, the epithet which kept recurring to his mind was "clean-run." . . . More, far more. He saw in that moment of revelation a comrade who would never fail him, with whom he could keep step on all the roads of life. It was that which all his days he had been confusedly seeking.

"Janet," he shouted against the wind, "will you marry me?"

She made a trumpet of one hand.

"What do you say?" she cried.

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes," she turned a laughing face, "of course I will."

"I'm coming across," he shouted.

"No. Stay where you are. I'll come to you."

She climbed the other bank and made for the bridge of larch-poles, and before he could prevent her she had embarked on that crazy structure. Then that happened which might have been foreseen, since the poles on Archie's side of the stream had no fixed foundation. They splayed out, and he was just in time to catch her in his arms as she sprang.

"You darling girl," he said, and she turned up to him a face smiling no more, but very grave.

Archie, his arms full of dripping maiden, stood in a happy trance.

"Please put me down," she said. "See, the mist is clearing. We must get into cover."

Sure enough the haze was lifting from the hillside before them and long tongues of black moorland were revealed stretching up to the crags. They found a place among the birches which gave them a safe prospect and fetched luncheon from the car. Hot coffee from a thermos was the staple of the meal, which they consumed like two pre-occupied children. Archie looked at his watch and found it after two o'clock. "Something must begin to happen soon," he said, and they took up position side by side on a sloping rock, Janet with her Zeiss glasses and Archie with his telescope.

His head was a delicious merry-go-round of hopes and dreams. It was full of noble thoughts—about Janet, and himself, and life. And the thoughts were mirthful too—a great, mellow, philosophic mirthfulness. John Macnab was no longer an embarrassing hazard, but a glorious adventure. It did not matter what happened—nothing could happen wrong in this spacious and rosy world. If Lamancha succeeded, it was a tremendous joke, if he failed a more tremendous, and, as for Leithen and Palliser-Yeates, comedy had marked them for its own. . . . He wondered what he had done to be blessed with such happiness.

Already the mist had gone from the foreground, and the hills were clear to half-way up the rocks of Sgurr Mór and Sgurr Dearg. He had his glass on the Beallach, on the throat of which a stray sun-gleam made a sudden patch of amethyst.

"I see some one," Janet cried. "On the edge of

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the pass. Have you got it?—on the left-hand side of that spout of stones.”

Archie found the place. “Got ’im. . . . By Jove, it’s Wattie. . . . And—and—yes, by all the gods, I believe he’s pulling a stag down. . . . Wait a second. . . . Yes, he’s hauling it into the burn. . . . Well done, our side! But where on earth is Charles?”

The two lay with their eyes glued on the patch of hill, now lit everywhere by the emerging sun. They saw the little figure dip into a hollow, appear again and then go out of sight in the upper part of a long narrow scaur which held the headwaters of a stream—they could see the foam of the little falls farther down. Before it disappeared Archie had made out a stag’s head against a background of green moss.

“That’s that,” he cried. “Charles must be somewhere behind protecting the rear. I suppose Wattie knows what he’s doing and is certain he can’t be seen by the navvies. Anyhow, he’s well hidden at present in the burn, but he’ll come into view lower down when the ravine opens out. He’s a tough old bird to move a beast at that pace. . . . The question now is, where is old John? It’s time he was getting busy.”

Janet, whose glass made up in width of range what it lacked in power, suddenly cried out: “I see him. Look! up at the edge of the rocks—three hundred yards west of the Beallach. He’s moving down-hill. I think it’s Mr. Palliser-Yeates—he’s the part of John Macnab I know best.”

Archie found the spot: “It’s old John right enough, and he’s doing his best to make himself conspicuous. Those yellow breeks of his are like

a flag. We've got a seat in the stalls and the curtain is going up. Now for the fun."

Then followed for the better part of an hour a drama of almost indecent sensation. Wattie and his stag were forgotten in watching the efforts of an eminent banker to play hare to the hounds of four gentlemen accustomed to labour rather with their hands than with their feet. It was the navy whose post was almost directly opposite Janet and Archie who first caught sight of the figure on the hill-side. He blew a whistle and began to move up-hill, evidently with the intention of cutting off the intruder's retreat to the east and driving him towards Haripol. But the quarry showed no wish to go east, for it was towards Haripol that he seemed to be making, by a long slant down the slopes.

"I've got Number Two," Janet whispered. "There—above the patch of scrub—close to the three boulders. . . . Oh, and there's Number Three. Mr. Palliser-Yeates is walking straight towards him. Do you think he sees him?"

"Trust old John. He's the wiliest of God's creatures, and he hasn't lost much pace since he played outside three-quarter for England. Wait till he starts to run."

But Mr. Palliser-Yeates continued at a brisk walk apparently oblivious of his foes, who were whistling like curlews, till he was very near the embraces of Number Three. Then he went through a very creditable piece of acting. Suddenly he seemed to be stricken with terror, looked wildly around to all the points of the compass, noted his pursuer, and, as if in a panic, ran blindly for the gap between Numbers Two and Three. Number

Four had appeared by this time, and Number Four was a strategist. He did not join in the pursuit, but moved rapidly down the glen towards Haripol to cut off the fugitive, should he outstrip the hunters.

Palliser-Yeates managed to get through the gap, and now appeared running strongly for the Doran, which at that point of its course—about half a mile down-stream from Janet and Archie—flowed in a deep-cut but not precipitous channel, much choked with birch and rowan. Numbers Two and Three followed, and also Number One, who had by now seen that there was no need of a rearguard. For a little all four disappeared from sight, and Janet and Archie looked anxiously at each other. Cries, excited cries, were coming up-stream, but there was no sign of human beings.

“John can’t have been such a fool as to get caught,” Archie grumbled. “He has easily the pace of those heavy-footed chaps. Wish he’d show himself.”

Presently first one, then a second, then a third navvy appeared on the high bank of the Doran, moving aimlessly, like hounds at fault.

“They’ve lost him,” Archie cried. “Where d’you suppose the leery old bird has got to? He can’t have gone to earth.”

That was not revealed for about twenty minutes. Then a cry from one of the navvies called the attention of the others to something moving high up on the hill-side.

“It’s John,” Archie muttered. “He must have crawled up one of the side-burns. Lord, that’s pretty work.”

The navvies began heavily to follow, though they

had a thousand feet of lee-way to make up. But it was no part of Palliser-Yeates's plan to discourage them, since he had to draw them clean away from the danger zone. Already this was almost achieved, for Wattie and his stag, even if he had left the ravine, were completely hidden from their view by a shoulder of hill. He pretended to be labouring hard, stumbling often, and now and then throwing himself on the heather in an attitude of utter fatigue, which was visible to the pursuit below.

"It's a dashed shame," murmured Archie. "Those poor fellows haven't a chance with John. I only hope Claybody is paying them well for this job."

The hare let the hounds get within a hundred yards of him. Then he appeared to realise their presence and to struggle to increase his pace, but, instead of ascending, he moved horizontally along the slope, slipping and sprawling in what looked like a desperate final effort. Hope revived in the navvies' hearts. Their voices could be heard—"You bet they're using shocking language," said Archie—and Number One, who seemed the freshest, put on a creditable spurt. Palliser-Yeates waited till the man was almost upon him, and then suddenly turned downhill. He ran straight for Number Two, dodged him with that famous swerve which long ago on the football field had set forty thousand people shouting, and went down the hill like a rolling stone. Once past the navy line, he seemed to slide a dozen yards and roll over, and when he got up he limped.

"Oh, he has hurt himself," Janet cried.

"Not a bit of it," said Archie. "It's the old

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fox's cunning. He's simply playing with the poor fellows. Oh, it's wicked!"

The navvies followed with difficulty, for they had no gift of speed on a steep hill-face. Palliser-Yeates waited again till they were very near him, and then, like a hen partridge dragging its wing, trotted down the more level ground by the stream side. The pursuit was badly cooked, but it lumbered gallantly along, Number Four now making the running. A quarter of a mile ahead was the beginning of the big Haripol woods which clothed the western skirts of Stob Ban, and stretched to the demesne itself.

Suddenly Palliser-Yeates increased his pace, with no sign of a limp, and, when he passed out of sight of the two on the rock, was going strongly.

Archie shut up his glass. "That's a workman-like show, if you like. He'll tangle them up in the woods, and slip out at his leisure and come home. I knew old John was abso-lute-ly safe. If he doesn't run slap into Macnicol——"

He broke off and stared in front of him. A figure like some ancient earth-dweller had appeared on the opposite bank. Hair, face, and beard were grimed with peat, sweat made furrows in the grime, and two fierce eyes glowered under shaggy eyebrows. Bumping against its knees were the antlers of a noble stag.

"Wattie," the two exclaimed with one voice.

"You old sportsman," cried Archie. "Did you pull that great brute all the way yourself? Where is Lord Lamancha?"

The stalker strode into the water dragging the stag behind him, and did not halt till he had it high

on the bank and close to the car. Then he turned his eyes on the two, and wrung the moisture from his beard.

"You needn't worry," Archie told him. "Mr. Palliser-Yeates has all the navvies in the Haripol woods."

"So I was thinkin'. I got a glisk of him up the burn. Yon's the soople one. But we've no time to loss. Help me to sling the beast into the cawr. This is a fine hidy-hole."

"Gad, what a stag!"

"It's the auld beast we've seen for the last five years. Ye mind me tellin' ye that he was at our stacks last winter. Come on quick, for I'll no be easy till he's in the Crask larder."

"But Lord Lamanca?"

"Never heed him. He's somewhere up the hill. It maitters little if he waits till the darkenin' afore he comes hame. The thing is, we've got the stag. Are ye ready?"

Archie started the car, which had already been turned in the right direction. Coats and wraps and heather were piled on the freight, and Wattie seated himself on it like an ancient raven.

"Now, tak a spy afore ye start. Is the place clear?"

Archie, from the rock, reported that the hill-side was empty.

"What about the Beallach?"

Archie spied long and carefully. "I see nothing there, but of course I only see the south end. There's a rock which hides the top."

"No sign o' his lordship?"

"Not a sign."

"Never heed. He can look after himsel' braw and weel. Push on wi' the cawr, sir, for it's time we were ower the hill."

Archie obeyed, and presently they were climbing the long zigzag to the Crask pass. Wattie on the back seat kept an anxious look out, issuing frequent bulletins, and Janet swept the glen with her glasses. But no sign of life appeared in the wide sunlit place except a buzzard high in the heavens and a weasel slipping into a cairn. Once the watershed had been crossed Wattie's heart lightened.

"Weel done, John Macnab," he cried. "Dod, ye're the great lad. Ye've beaten a hundred navvies and Macnicol and a', and ye've gotten the best heid in the country-side. . . . Hae ye a match for my pipe, Sir Erchie? Mine's been in ower mony bog-holes to kindle."

It was a clear, rain-washed world on which they looked, and the sky to the south was all an unbroken blue. The air was not sticky and oppressive like yesterday, but pure and balmy and crystalline. When Crask was reached the stag was decanted with expedition, and Archie addressed Janet with a new authority.

"I'm goin' to take you straight home in the Hispana. You're dripping wet and ought to change at once."

"Might I change here?" the girl asked. "I told them to send over dry things, for I was sure it would be a fine afternoon. You see, I think we ought to go to Haripol."

"Whatever for?"

"To be in at the finish—and also to give Lady

Claybody back her dog. Wee Roguie is rather on my conscience."

"That's a good notion," Archie assented. So Janet was handed over to Mrs. Lithgow, who admitted that a suit-case had indeed arrived from Glenraden. Archie repaired to the upper bathroom, which Lamancha had aforetime likened to a drain-pipe, and, having bathed rapidly, habited himself in a suit of a reasonable newness and took special pains with his toilet. And all the while he whistled and sang, and generally comported himself like a madman. Janet was under his roof—Janet would soon always be there—the most miraculous of fates was his! Somebody must be told, so when he was ready he went out to seek the Bluidy Mackenzie and made that serious-minded beast the receptacle of his confidences.

He returned to find a neat and smiling young woman conversing with Fish Benjie, whose task had been that of comforter and friend to Roguie. It appeared that the small dog had been having the morning of his life with the Crask rats and rabbits. "He's no a bad wee dog," Benjie reported, "if they'd let him alane. They break his temper keepin' him indoors and feedin' him ower high."

"Benjie must come too," Janet announced. "It would be a shame to keep him back. You understand—Benjie found Roguie in the woods—which is true, and handed him over to me—which is also true. I don't like unnecessary fibbing."

"Right-o! Let's have the whole bag of tricks. But, I say, you've got to stage-manage this show. Benjie and I put ourselves in your hands, for

I'm hanged if I know what to say to Lady Claybody."

"It's quite simple. We're just three nice clean people—well, two clean people—who go to Haripol on an errand of mercy. Get out the Hispana, Archie dear, for I feel that something tremendous may be happening there."

As they started—Benjie and Roguie on the back seat—the Bluidy Mackenzie came into view, hungrily eyeing an expedition from which he seemed to be barred.

"D'you mind if we take Mackenzie?" Archie begged. "We'll go very slow, and he can trollop behind. The poor old fellow has been having a lonely time of it, and there's likely to be such a mix-up at Haripol that an extra hound won't signify."

Janet approved, and they swung down the hill and on to the highway, as respectable an outfit as the heart could wish, except for the waterproof-caped urchin on the back seat. The casual wayfarer would have noted only a very pretty girl and a well-appointed young man driving an expensive car at a most blameless pace. He could not guess what a cargo of dog-thieves and deer-thieves was behind the shining metal and spruce enamel. . . . Benjie talked to Wee Roguie in his own tongue, and what Janet and Archie said in whispers to each other is no concern of this chronicle. The sea at Inverlarrig was molten silver running to the translucent blue of the horizon, the shore woods gleamed with a thousand jewels, the abundant waters plashing in every hollow were channels of living light. The world sang in streams and soft

winds, the cries of plover and the pipe of shore-birds, and Archie's heart sang above them all.

Close to Haripol gates a tall figure rose from the milestone as the car slowed down.

"Well, John, my aged sportsman, you did your part like a man. We saw it all."

"How are things going?"

"Famously."

"The stag?"

"In the Crask larder."

"And Charles?"

"Lost. Believed to be still lurking in the hills. Look here, John, get in beside Benjie. We are going to call at Haripol and restore the pup. You'll be a tower of strength to us, and old Claybody will be tremendously bucked to meet a brother magnate. . . . Really, I mean it."

"I'm scarcely presentable," said Palliser-Yeates, taking off an old cap and looking at it meditatively.

"Rot! You're as tidy as you'll ever be. Rather dandified for you. In you get, and don't tread on the hound. . . . Bloody, you brute, don't you know a pal when you see him?"

XLI: HARIPOL—AUXILIARY TROOPS

HALF-WAY down the avenue Archie drew up sharply.

"I forgot about Mackenzie. We can't have him here—he'll play the fool somehow. Benjie, out you go. You're one of the few that can manage him. Here's his lead—you tie him up somewhere and watch for us, and we'll pick you up outside the gates when we start home. . . . Don't get into

trouble on your own account. I advise you to cut round to the bothies, and try to find out what is happening."

On the massive doorstep of Haripol stood Lady Claybody, parasol in one hand and the now useless dog-whip in the other. She made a motion as if to retreat, but thought better of it. Her face was flushed, and her air had abated something of its serenity. The sight of Janet—for she looked at Archie without recognition—seemed to awake her to the duties of hospitality, and she advanced with outstretched hand. Then a yelp from the side of Palliser-Yeates wrung from her an answering cry. In a trice Wee Roguie was in her arms.

"Yes," Janet explained sweetly, "it's Roguie quite safe and well. There's a boy who sells fish at Strathlarrig—Benjie they call him—he found him in the woods and brought him to me. I hope you haven't been worried."

But Lady Claybody was not listening. She had set the dog on his feet and was wagging her forefinger at him, a procedure which seemed to rouse all the latent epilepsy of his nature. "Oh, you naughty, naughty Roguie! Cruel, cruel doggie! He loved freedom better than his happy home. Master and Mistress have been so anxious about Wee Roguie."

It was an invocation which lasted for two and a half minutes till the invoker realised the presence of the men. She graciously shook hands with Archie.

"I drove Miss Janet over," said the young man, explaining the obvious. "And I took the liberty of bringing a friend who is staying with me—Mr.

Palliser-Yeates. I thought Lord Claybody might like to meet him, for I expect he knows all about him."

The lady beamed on both. "This is a very great pleasure, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, and I'm sure Claybody will be delighted. He ought to be in for tea very soon." As it chanced, Lady Claybody had an excellent memory and a receptive ear for talk, and she was aware that in her husband's conversation the name of Palliser-Yeates occurred often, and always in dignified connections.

She led the way through the hall to a vast new drawing-room, which commanded a wide stretch of lawns and flower-beds as far as the woods which muffled the mouth of the Reascuill glen. When the party were seated and butler and footmen had brought the materials for tea, Lady Claybody—Rogue on a cushion by her side—became confidential.

"We've had such a wearing day, my dear," she turned to Janet. "First, the ruffian who calls himself John Macnab is probably trying to poach our forest. The rain yesterday kept him off, but we have good reason to believe that he will come to-day. Poor Johnson has been on the hill since breakfast. Then there was the anxiety about Rogue. I've had our people searching the woods and shrubberies, for the little darling might have been caught in a trap. . . . Macnicol says there are no traps, but you never can tell. And then, on the top of it all, we've been besieged since quite early in the morning by insolent journalists. No. They hadn't the good manners to come to the house—I should have sent them packing—but they have

been all over the grounds and buttonholing our servants. They want to hear about John Macnab, but we can't tell them anything, for as yet we know nothing ourselves. I gave orders that they should be turned out of the place—no violence, of course, for it doesn't do to offend the Press—but quite firmly, for they were trespassing. Would you believe it, my dear? they wouldn't go. So our people had simply to drive them out, and it has taken nearly all day, and they may be coming back any moment. . . . Something should really be done, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, to restrain the licence of the modern Press, with its horrid, vulgar sensationalism and its invasion of all the sanctities of private life."

Palliser-Yeates cordially agreed. The lady had not looked to Archie for assent, and her manner towards him was a trifle cold. Perhaps it was the memory of her visit a fortnight before, when he was sickening for smallpox; perhaps it was her husband's emphatic condemnation of his Muirtown speech.

At this point Lord Claybody entered, magnificent in a kilt of fawn-coloured tweed and a ferocious sporran made of the mask of a dog-otter. The garments, which were aggressively new, did not become his short, square figure.

"I don't think you have met my husband, Miss Raden," said his wife. Then to Lord Claybody: "You know Sir Archibald Roylance. And this is Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who has been so kind as to come over to see us."

Palliser-Yeates was greeted with enthusiasm. "Delighted to meet you, sir. I heard you were in

the North. Funny that we've had so much to do with each other indirectly and have never met. . . . You've been having a long walk? Well, I know what you need. Cold tea for you. We'll leave the ladies to their gossip and have a whisky-and-soda in the library. I've just had a letter from Dickinson on which I'd like your views. Busy folk like you and me can never make a clean cut of their holiday. There's always something clawing us back to the mill."

The two men were led off to the library, and Janet was left to entertain her hostess. That lady was in an expansive mood, which may have been due to the restoration of Roguie, but also owed something to the visit of Palliser-Yeates. "My heart is buried here," she told the girl. "Every day I love Haripol more—its beauty and its poetry and its—its wonderful traditions. My dream is to make it a centre for all the nicest people to come and rest. Everybody comes to the Highlands now, and we have so much to offer them here. . . . Claybody, I may as well admit, is apt to be restless when we are alone. He is not enough of a sportsman to be happy shooting and fishing all day and every day. He has a wonderful mind, my dear, and he wants a chance of exercising it. He needs to be stimulated. Look how his eye brightened when he saw Mr. Palliser-Yeates. . . . And then there are the girls. . . . I'm sure you see what I mean."

Janet saw, and set herself to cherish the innocent ambition of her hostess. In view of what might befall at any moment, it was most needful to have the Claybodys in a good humour. Then Lady Claybody, one of whose virtues was a love of

fresh air, proposed that they should walk in the gardens. Janet would have preferred to remain in the house, had she been able to think of any kind of excuse, for the out-of-doors at the moment was filled with the most explosive material—Benjie, Mackenzie, an assortment of fugitive journalists, and Leithen and Lamancha somewhere in the hinterland. But she assented with a good grace, and, accompanied by Roguie, who after a morning of liberty had cast the part of lap-dog contemptuously behind him, they sauntered into the trim parterres.

The head-gardener at Haripol was a man of the old school. He loved fantastically shaped beds and geometrical patterns, and geraniums and lobelias and calceolarias were still dear to his antiquated soul. On the lawns he had been given his head, but Lady Claybody, who had accepted new fashions in horticulture as in other things, had constructed a pleasaunce of her own, which with crazy-paving and sundials and broad borders was a very fair imitation of an old English garden. She had a lily-pond and a rosery and many pergolas, and what promised in twenty years to be a fine yew-walk. The primitive walled garden, planted in the Scots fashion a long way from the house, was now relegated to fruit and vegetables.

Lady Claybody was an inaccurate enthusiast. She poured into Janet's ear a flow of botanical information and mispronounced Latin names. Each innovation was modelled on what she had seen or heard of at some famous country house. The girl approved, for in that glen the environment of hill and wood was so masterful that the

artifices of man were instantly absorbed. The gardens exhausted, they wandered through the rhododendron thickets, which in early summer were towers of flame, crossed the turbid Reascuill by a rustic bridge, and found themselves in a walk which skirted the stream through a pleasant wilderness. Here an expert from Kew had been turned loose, and had made a wonderful wild garden, in which patches of red-hot pokers and godetia and *Hyacinthus candicans* shone against the darker carpet of the heather. Roguie led the way, and where Roguie's yelps beckoned his mistress followed. Soon the two were nearly a mile from the house, approaching the portals of the Reascuill glen.

Sir Edward Leithen left Crask just as the wet dawn was breaking. He had a very long walk before him, but at that he was not dismayed ; what perplexed him was how it was going to end. To the first part, a struggle with wind and rain and many moorland miles, he looked forward with enthusiasm. Long, lonely expeditions had always been his habit, for he was the kind of man who could be happy with his own thoughts. Before it became the fashion he had been a pioneer in guideless climbing in the Alps, and the red-letter days in his memory were for the most part solitary days. He was always in hard condition, and his lean figure rarely knew fatigue ; weather he minded little, and he had long ago taught himself how to find his road, even in mist, with map and compass.

So it was with sincere enjoyment that his legs covered the rough miles—along the Crask ridge

till it curved round at the head of the Doran and led him to the eastern skirts of Sgurr Dearg. He knew from the map that the great eastern precipice of that mountain was towering above him, but he saw only the white wall of fog a dozen yards off. His aim was to make a circuit of the *massif* and bear round to the pass of the Red Burn, which made a road between Haripol and Machray. He would then be nearly due north of the Sanctuary and exactly opposite where Lamancha proposed to make his entrance. . . . A fortnight earlier, when he first came to Crask, he had gone for a walk in far pleasanter weather, and had been acutely bored. Now, with no prospect but a wet blanket of mist, and with no chance of observing bird or plant, he was enjoying every moment of it. More, his thoughts were beginning to turn pleasantly towards the other side of his life—his books and hobbies, the intricacies of politics, the legal practice of which he was a master. He reflected almost with exhilaration on a difficult appeal which would come on in the autumn, when he hoped to induce the House of Lords to upset a famous judgment. He had begun to relish his competence again, even to take a modest pride in his fame; what had been dust and ashes in his mouth a few weeks ago had now an agreeable flavour. Palliser-Yeates was of the same way of thinking. Had he not declared last night that he wanted to give orders again and be addressed as "sir," instead of being chivvied about the countryside? And Lamancha? Leithen seriously doubted if Lamancha had ever suffered from quite the same malady. The trouble with him was that

he had always a large streak of bandit in his composition, and must now and then give it play. That was what made him the bigger man, perhaps. Charles might take an almighty toss some day, but if he did not he would be first at the post, for he rode more gallantly to win.

"I suppose I may regard myself as cured," Leithen reflected, as he munched a second breakfast of cheese-sandwiches and raisins somewhere under the north-eastern spur of Sgurr Dearg. But he reflected, too, that he had a horribly difficult day ahead of him, for which he felt a strong distaste. He realised the shrewdness of Acton Croke's diagnosis: he was longing once more for the flesh-pots of the conventional.

His orders had been to be somewhere on the Machray side by eight o'clock, and he saw by his watch that he was ahead of his time. Once he had turned the corner of Sgurr Dearg the wind was shut off and the mist wrapped him closer. He had acquired long ago a fast but regular pace on the hills, and, judging from the time and the known distance, he knew that he must now be very near the Machray march. Presently he had topped a ridge which was clearly a watershed, for the plentiful waters now ran west. Then he began to descend, and soon was brought up by a raging torrent which seemed to be flowing north-west. This must be the Red Burn, coming down from the gullies of Sgurr Dearg, and it was his business to cross it and work his way westward along the edge of the great trough of the Reascuill. But he must go warily, for he was very near the pass, by which, according to the map, a road could be

Al. Horned Hill

found from Corrie Easain in the Machray forest to the Haripol Sanctuary—the road which, according to Wattie Lithgow, gave the easiest access and would most assuredly be well watched.

He crossed the stream, not without difficulty, and climbed another ridge, beyond which the ground fell steeply. These must be the screes on the Reascuill side, he concluded, so he bore to the right and found, as he expected, that here there was a re-entrant corrie, and that he was on the very edge of the great trough. It was for him now to keep this edge, but to go circumspectly, for at any moment he might stumble upon some of Claybody's sentries. His business was to occupy their attention, but he did not see what good he could do. The mist was distraction enough, for in it no man could see twenty yards ahead of him. But it might clear, and in that case he would have his work cut out for him. Meanwhile he must avoid a premature collision.

He avoided it only by a hairbreadth. Suddenly that happened which at the moment was perplexing Wattie Lithgow and Lamancha a mile off. Corridors opened in the air—dark corridors of dizzy space and black rock seamed with torrents. Leithen found himself looking into a cauldron of which only the bottom was still hid, and at the savage splinters of the Pinnacle Ridge. He was looking at something less welcome, for thirty yards off on the edge of the scarp was a group of five men.

They had been boiling tea in billies in the lee of a rock and had been stirred to attention by the sudden clearing of the air. They saw him as soon as he saw them, and in a moment were on their feet

and spreading out in his direction. He heard a cry, and then a babble of tongues.

Leithen did the only thing possible. He strode towards them with a magisterial air. They were the real navvy, the hardiest race in the land, sleeping in drain-pipes, always dirty and wet, forgetting their sodden labours now and then in drink, but tough, formidable, and resourceful.

"What the devil are you fellows doing here?" he shouted angrily.

At first they took him for a gillie.

"What the hell's your business?" one of them replied, but the advance had halted. As he came nearer, they changed their minds, for Leithen had not the air of a gillie.

"My business is to know what you're doing here—on my land?"

Now Machray forest was not let that season, and this Leithen knew. If any arrangement had been come to with Haripol it could only have been made between the stalkers. It was for him to play the part of the owner.

The men looked nonplussed, for the navvy, working under heavy-handed foremen, is susceptible to the voice of authority.

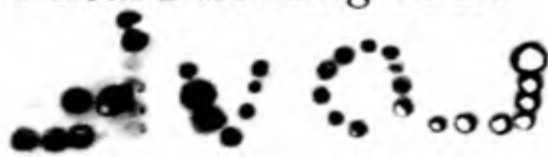
"We were sent up here to keep a look-out," one answered.

"Look out for what? Who sent you?"

"It was Lord Claybody—we took our orders from Mr. Macnicol."

Leithen sat down on a stone and lit his pipe.

"Well, you're trespassing on Machray—my ground. I don't know what on earth Lord Claybody means. I have heard nothing of it."



"There's a man tryin' to poach, sir. We were telled to wait here and keep a look out for him."

Leithen smiled grimly. "A pretty look out you can keep in this weather. But that doesn't touch the point that you're in a place where you've no right to be. . . . You poor devils must have been having a rotten time roosting up here."

He took out his flask. *I am your wife.*

"Here's something to warm you. There's just enough for a tot apiece." *Love with me*

The flask was passed round amid murmurs of satisfaction, while Leithen smoked his pipe and surveyed the queer party. *super Rou no*

"I call it cruelty to animals," he said, "to plant you fellows in a place like this. I hope you're well paid for it."

"We're gettin' a pound a day, and the man that grips the poacher gets a five-pund note. The name o' the poacher is Macnab."

"Well, I hope one of you will earn the fiver. Now, look here. I can't have you moving a yard north of this. You're on Machray ground as it is, for my march is the edge of the hill. I don't mind you squatting here, and of course it's no business of mine what you do on Haripol, but you don't stir a foot into Machray. With this wind you'll put all the beasts out of the upper corries."

He rose and strolled away. "I must be off. See that you mind what I've said. If you move, it must be into Haripol. A poacher! I never heard such rubbish. Better my job than yours, anyway. Still, I hope you get that fiver!"

Leithen departed in an atmosphere of general



good-will, and as soon as possible put a ridge between himself and the navvies. It had been a narrow escape, but mercifully no harm was done. He must keep well below the skyline on the Machray side, for there would be watchers elsewhere on the Haripol ground and he was not ready as yet to play the decoy-duck. For it had occurred to him that he was still too far east for his purpose. Those navvies were watching the pass from the Red Burn, and had no concern with what might be happening in the Sanctuary. Indeed, they could not see into it because of the spur which Sgurr Dearg flung out toward the Reascuill. He must be farther down the stream before he tried to interest those who might interfere with Lamancha; so he mended his pace, and, keeping well on the Machray side, made for the hill called Bheinn Fhada, which faced Sgurr Mór across the Reascuill.

Then the mist came down again, and in driving sleet Leithen scrambled among the matted boulders and screes of Bheinn Fhada's slopes. Here he knew he was safe enough, for he was inside the Machray march and out of any possible prospect from the Reascuill. But it was a useless labour, and the return of the thick weather began to try his temper. The good humour of the morning had gone, when it was a delight to be abroad in the wilds alone and to pit his strength against storm and distance. He was growing bored with the whole business and at the same time anxious to play the part which had been set him. As it was, wandering on the skirts of Bheinn Fhada, he was as little use to John Macnab as if he had been reading Sir Walter Scott in the Crask smoking-room.

It took him longer than he expected to pass that weariful mountain, and it was noon before he ate the remnants of the food he had brought in the hollow which lies at the head of the second main Machray corrie, Corrie na Sidhe. Here he observed that sight which at the same moment was perturbing Lamanha on the Beallach looking over to Crask. The mist was thinning—not breaking into gloomy corridors, but lightening everywhere with the sun behind it. The wind, too, had shifted ; it was blowing in his face from the south. Suddenly the top of Stob Coire Easain in front of him stood clear and bright, and its upper crags, jewelled with falling waters, rose out of a rainbow haze. Far out on the right he saw a patch of silver which he knew for the sea. Nearer, and far below, was an olive-green splash which must be the Haripol woods. And then, as if under a wizard's wand, the glen below him from a pit of vapour became an enamelled cup, with the tawny Reascuill looped in its hollows.

It was time for Leithen to be up and doing. He crawled to a point which gave him cover and a view into the glen, and searched the place long and carefully with his glasses. There must be navy posts close at hand, but from where he lay he could not command the sinuosities of the hill-side below him. He saw the nest of upper corries which composed the Sanctuary, but not the Beallach, which was hidden by the ridge of Sgurr Mór. . . . He lay there for half an hour, uncertain what he should do next. If he descended into the glen it meant certain capture, for he would be cut off by some lower post. The only plan seemed to be to show himself

on the upper slopes and then try to draw the pursuit off towards Machray, but he did not see how such a course was going to help Lamanha in the Sanctuary. The plan of campaign, he decided, had been a great deal too elaborate, and his part looked like a wash-out.

He made his way along the hill-side towards the Machray peak which bore the name of Clonlet and the wide skirts of which made one side of the glen above Haripol, the opposite sentinel to Stob Ban. He had got well on to the slopes of that mountain when he detected something in the glen below. Men seemed to be moving down the stream—three at least—and to be moving fast. His sense of duty revived, for here seemed a task to his hand. . . . He showed himself on an out-jutting knoll and waited. The men below had their eyes about them, for he was almost instantly observed. He heard cries, he saw a hand waved, then he heard a whistle blown. . . . After that he began to run.

At this point the chronicler must retrace his steps and follow the doings of Mr. Johnson Claybody. That young gentleman had taken the threat of John Macnab most seriously to heart: he felt his honour involved, his sense of property outraged, and he saw the pride of the Claybodys lowered if the scoundrel were victorious on Haripol as he had been at Strathlarrig. Above all, he feared the Press, which was making a holiday feature of this monstrous insolence. He it was who had devised the plan of defence, a plan which did credit to his wits. Not only had he placed his sentries with care, but he had arranged for peripatetic gillies to patrol

between the stations and form an intelligence service for head-quarters. His *poste de commandement* was at Macnicol's cottage just beyond the gorge of the Reascuill and some two miles from the house.

All morning his temper had been worsening. The news of the journalistic invasion of Haripol, brought to him about ten o'clock by a heated garden-boy, had been the first shock. He had sent a message to his father, handing over to him that problem, with the results which we have seen. Also he was lamentably short of the force he had hoped to muster, owing to his mother's insistence on keeping Macnicol and two of the gillies behind to look for her dog. It was not till close on midday that, after a furious journey to the house in a two-seater car, he was able to recover the services of the head-stalker. Macnicol, he felt, should have been on the edge of the Sanctuary at daybreak; instead he had had to send Macqueen, a surly ruffian whom he had dismissed for insolence, but whose hill-craft he knew to be of the first order. Johnson's plan was that towards midday he himself, with a posse, should patrol the upper forest, so that, if John Macnab should be lurking there, he might drive him north or south against the navy garrison. East, Sgurr Dearg shut the way, and west lay the grounds of Haripol, where escape would be impossible, since every living thing there was on the watch. Johnson's blood was up. If John Macnab had made his venture, he wanted to share directly in the chase and to be in at the death.

It was after midday before the flying column started. It was composed of Macnicol, Cameron

the third stalker, two selected gillies, and three of the navvies who were more mobile than their fellows. Macnicol had prophesied that the weather would clear in the afternoon, so, though the mist was thick at the start, they took the road with confidence. Sure enough, it began to lift before they were half a mile up the glen, and Macnicol grunted his satisfaction.

"Macnab cannot escape noways," he said. "But I do not think he has come at all, unless he's daft. He would not get in, but, if he is in, he will never get out."

Johnson's one fear now was that the assault might not have been made. It would be a poor ending to his strategy if the pool were dragged and no fish were found in it. But presently he was reassured, for at the foot of Bheinn Fhada he met one of the patrolling gillies with tremendous news. A man had been seen that morning by the navvies at the Red Burn. He had passed as the Laird of Machray, and had given them whisky. The gillie knew that the Laird of Machray was a child of three dwelling at Bournemouth, and he had demanded a description of the visitor. It was a tallish man, they said, lean and clean-shaven, rather pale, and with his skin very tight over his cheek-bones. He had looked like a gentleman and had behaved as such. Now the only picture of John Macnab known to the gillies was that which had been broadcast in talk by Angus and Jimsie of Strathlarrig, and that agreed most startlingly with the navvies' account. "A long, lean dog," Angus had said, "and whitish in the face." Wherefore the gillie had hastened with his tidings to head-quarters.

The news increased Johnson's pace. John Macnab was veritably in the forest, and at the thought he grew both nervous and wroth. There was something supernatural, he felt, about the impudence of a man who could march quietly up to a post of navvies and bluff them. Were all his subtle plans to be foiled? Then, half a mile on, appeared Macqueen, just descended from his eyrie.

Macqueen had to report that half an hour before, when the mist cleared and he could get a view of the corries, he had seen the deer moving. The wind at the same time had shifted to the south, and the beasts in the corrie below the Beallach were frightened. He had seen nothing with his telescope—the beasts had been moved some time before, he thought, for they were well down the hill. In his opinion, if John Macnab was in the forest he was on or beyond the Beallach.

Johnson considered furiously. "The fellow was at the Red Burn just before nine o'clock. He must have gone through the Sanctuary to be at the Beallach half an hour ago. Is that possible, Macnicol?"

"I don't ken." Macnicol scratched his head. "Macqueen says that only the beasts in the corrie below the Beallach were moved, but if he had gone through the Sanctuary they would have been all rinnin' oot. I'm fair puzzled, sir, unless he cam' doun the water and worked up by Sgurr Mór. That Macnab's a fair deevil."

"We'll get after him," said Johnson, and then he stopped short. He had a sudden memory of what had happened at Glenraden. Why should not John

Macnab have sent a confederate to gull them into the belief that he was busy in the Sanctuary, while he himself killed a stag in the woods around the house? There were plenty of beasts there, and it would be like his infernal insolence to poach one under the very windows of Haripol. It was true that the woodland stags were not easy to stalk, but Macnab had shown himself a mighty artist.

Johnson had a gift of quick decision. He briefly explained to his followers his suspicions. "The man at the Beallach may not be the man whom the navvies saw at the Red Burn. The Red Burn fellow may have gone down the Machray side, and be now in the woods. . . . Cameron, you take Andrew and Peter, and get down the glen in double-quick time. If you see anybody on Clonlet or in the woods, hunt him like hell. I'll skin you if you let him escape. Drive him right down to the gardens, and send word to the men there to be on the look-out. You'll be a dozen against one. Macnicol, you come with me, and you, Macqueen, and you three fellows, and we'll make for the Beallach. We'll cut up through the Sanctuary, for it don't matter a damn about the deer if we only catch that swine. He's probably lying up there till he can slip out in the darkness . . . And, Cameron, tell them to send a car up the Doran road. I may want a lift home."

It was Cameron and his posse who spied Leithen on the side of Clonlet. All three were young men, and they had the priceless advantage of acquaintance with the ground, while Leithen knew no more

than the generalities of the map. As soon as he saw that he was pursued he turned up-hill with the purpose of making for Machray. He had had a long walk, but he felt fresh enough for another dozen miles or so, and he remembered his instructions to go north, if necessary even into Glenaicill.

But in this he had badly miscalculated. For the whistle of Cameron had alarmed a post of navvies in a nook of hill behind Leithen and at a greater altitude, who had missed him earlier for the simple reason that they had been asleep. Roused now to a sudden attention, they fanned out on the slope and cut him off effectively from any retreat towards Corrie na Sidhe. There were only two courses open to him—to climb the steep face of Clonlet or to go west towards the woods. The first would be hard, he did not even know whether the rock was climbable, and if he stuck there he would be an easy prey. He must go west, and trust to find some way to Machray round the far skirts of the mountain.

Cameron did not hurry, for he knew what would happen. So long as the navvies cut off retreat to the east the victim was safe. Leithen did not realise his danger till he found himself above the woods on a broad grassy ledge just under the sheer rocks of Clonlet. It was the place called Crapnagower, which ended not in a hill-side by which the butt of Clonlet could be turned, but in a bold promontory of rock which fell almost sheer to the meadows of Haripol. Long before he got to the edge he had an uncomfortable suspicion of what was coming, but when he peered over the brink and saw cattle at grass far below him, he had an ugly

shock. It looked as if he were cornered, and cornered too in a place far from the main scene of action, where his misfortunes could not benefit Lamancha.

He turned and plunged downward through the woods direct for Haripol. There was still plenty of fight in him, and his pursuers would have a run for their money. These pursuers were not far off. Andrew had climbed the hill and had been moving fast parallel to Leithen, but farther down among the trees. Cameron was on the lower road, a grassy aisle among the thickets, and Peter, the swifter, had gone on ahead to watch the farther slopes. It was not long before Leithen was made aware of Andrew, and the sight forced him to his right in a long slant which would certainly have taken him into the arms of Peter.

But at this moment the Fates intervened in the person of Crossby.

That eminent correspondent, having inspired his fellow-journalists with the spirit of all mischief and thereby sadly broken the peace of Haripol, was now lying up from further pursuit in the woods, confident that he had done his best for the cause. Suddenly he became aware of the ex-Attorney-General descending the hill in leaps and bounds, and a gillie not fifty yards behind on his trail. . . . Crossby behaved like Sir Philip Sidney and other cavaliers in similar crises. "Thy need is the greater," was his motto, and as Leithen passed he whispered hoarsely to him to get into cover. Leithen, whose head was clear enough though his legs were aching, both heard and saw. He clapped down like a woodcock in a patch of bracken, while

Crossby, whose garb and height were much the same as his, became the quarry in his stead.

The chase was not of long duration. The correspondent did not know the ground, nor did he know of the waiting Peter. Left to himself he might have outdistanced Andrew, but he was watched from below by wily eyes. He reached the grassy path, turned to his right, and rounded a corner to be embraced firmly and affectionately by the long arms of the gillie. "That's five pund in our pockets, Andra, ma man," the latter observed when the second gillie arrived. "If this is no John Macnab, it's his brither, and anyway we've done what we were telled." So, strongly held by the two men, the self-sacrificing Crosby departed into captivity.

Of these doings Leithen knew nothing. He did not believe that Crosby could escape, but the hunt had gone out of his ken. Now it is the nature of man that, once he is in flight, he cannot be content till he finds an indisputable place of refuge. This wood was obviously unhealthy, and he made haste to get out of it. But he must go circumspectly, and the first need was for thicker cover, for this upper part was too open for his comfort. Below he saw denser scrub, and he started to make his way to it.

The trouble was that presently he came into Cameron's view. The stalker had heard the crash of Crosby's pursuit, and had not hurried himself, knowing the strategic value of Peter's position. He proposed to wait, in case the fugitive doubled back. Suddenly he caught sight of Leithen farther up the hill, and apparently unfollowed. Had the

man given the two gillies the slip? . . . Cameron performed a very creditable piece of stalking. He wormed his way up-hill till he was above the bushes where Leithen was now sheltering. The next thing that much-enduring gentleman knew was that a large hand had been outstretched to grip his collar.

Like a stag from covert Leithen leaped forth, upsetting Cameron with his sudden bound. He broke through the tangle of hazel and wild raspberries, and stayed not on the order of his going. His pace down-hill had always been remarkable, and Cameron's was no match for it. Soon he had gained twenty yards, then fifty, but he had no comfort in his speed, for somewhere ahead were more gillies and he was being forced straight on Haripol, which was thick with the enemy.

The only plan in his head was to make for the Reascuill, which he was aware flowed at this part of its course in a deep-cut gorge. He had a faint hope that, once there, he might find a place to lie up in till the darkness, for he knew that the Highland gillie is rarely a rock-climber. But the place grew more horrible as he continued. He was among rhododendrons now, and well-tended grass walks. Yes, there was a rustic arbour and what looked like a summer-seat. The beastly place was a garden. In another minute he would be among flower-pots and vineries with twenty gardeners at his heels. But the river was below—he could hear its sound—so, like a stag hard pressed by hounds, he made for the running water. A long slither took him down a steep bank of what had once been fox-gloves, and he found his feet on a path.

And there, to his horror, were two women.

By this time his admirable wind was considerably touched, and the sweat was blinding his eyes, so that he did not see clearly. But surely one of the two was known to him.

Janet rose to the occasion like a bird. As he stood blinking before her she laughed merrily :

"Sir Edward," she cried, "where in the world have you been? You've taken a very rough road." Then she turned to Lady Claybody. "This is Sir Edward Leithen. He is staying with us and went out for an enormous walk this morning. He is always doing it. It was lucky you came this way, Sir Edward, for we can give you a lift home."

Lady Claybody was delighted, she said, to meet one of whom she had heard so much. He must come back to the house at once and have tea and see her husband. "I call this a real romance," she cried. "First Mr. Palliser-Yeates—and then Sir Edward Leithen dropping like a stone from the hill-side."

Leithen was beginning to recover himself. "I'm afraid I was trespassing," he murmured. "I tried a short cut and got into difficulties. I hope I didn't alarm you coming down that hill like an avalanche. I find it the easiest way."

The mystified Cameron stood speechless, watching his prey vanishing in the company of his mistress.

XLII: HARIPOL—WOUNDED AND MISSING

LAMANCHA watched Palliser-Yeates disappear along the hill-side, and then returned to the hollow top of the Beallach, which was completely

cut off from view on either side. All that was now left of the mist was a fleeting vapour twining in scarves on the highest peaks, and the cliffs of Sgurr Dearg and Sgurr Mór towered above him in gleaming stairways. The drenched cloudberry sparkled in the sunlight, and the thousand little rivulets, which in the gloom had been hoarse with menace, made now a pleasant music. Lamancha's spirits rose as the world brightened. He proposed to wait for a quarter of an hour till Wattie with the stag was well down the ravine and Palliser-Yeates had secured the earnest attention of the navvies. Then he would join Wattie and help him with the beast, and within a couple of hours he might be wallowing in a bath at Crask, having bidden John Macnab a long farewell.

Meantime he was thirsty, and laid himself on the ground for a long drink at an icy spring, leaving his rifle on a bank of heather.

When he rose with his eyes dim with water he had an unpleasing surprise. A man stood before him, having in his hands his rifle, which he pointed threateningly at the rifle's owner.

"'Ands up," the man shouted. He was a tall fellow in navvy's clothes, with a shock head of black hair, and a week's beard—an uncouth figure with a truculent eye.

"Put that down," said Lamancha. "You fool, it's not loaded. Hand it over. Quick!"

For answer the man swung it like a cudgel.

"'Ands up," he repeated. "'Ands up, you——, or I'll do you in."

By this time Lamancha had realised that his opponent was the peripatetic navvy whom

Palliser-Yeates had reported. An ugly customer he looked, and resolute to earn Claybody's promised reward.

"What do you want?" he asked. "You're behaving like a lunatic."

"I want you to 'ands up and come along o' me."

"Who on earth do you take me for?"

"You're the poacher—Macnab. I seen you, and I seen the old fellow and the stag. You're Macnab, I reckon, and you're the —— I'm after. Up with your 'ands and look sharp."

Mendacity was obviously out of the question, so Lamancha tried conciliation.

"Supposing I am Macnab—let's talk a little sense. You're being paid for this job, and the man who catches me is to have something substantial. Well, whatever Lord Claybody has promised you I'll double it if you let me go."

The man stared for a second without answering, and then his face crimsoned. But it was not with avarice but with wrath.

"No, you don't," he cried. "By —— you don't come over me that way. I'm not the kind as sells his boss. I'm a white man, I am, and I'll —— well let you see it. 'Ands up, you ——, and march. I've a —— good mind to smash your 'ead for tryin' to buy me."

Lamancha looked at the fellow, his shambling figure contorted by hard toil out of its natural balance, his thin face, his hot, honest eyes, and suddenly felt ashamed. "I beg your pardon," he grunted. "I oughtn't to have said that. I had no right to insult you. But of course I refuse to surrender. You've got to catch me."

He followed his words by a dive to his right, hoping to get between the man and the Sgurr Mór cliffs. But the navy was too quick for him, and he had to retreat baffled. Lamancha was beginning to realise that the situation was really awkward. This fellow was both active and resolved; even if he gave him the slip he would be pursued down to the Doran, and the destination of the stag would be revealed. . . . But he was by no means sure that he could give him the slip. He was already tired and cramped, and he had never been noted for his speed, like Leithen and Palliser-Yeates. . . . He thought of another way, for in his time he had been a fair amateur middle-weight.

"You're an Englishman. What about settling the business with our fists? Put the rifle down, and we'll stand up together."

The man spat sarcastically. "Ain't it likely?" he sneered. "Thank you kindly, but I'm takin' no risks this trip. You've got to 'ands up and let me tie 'em so as you're safe and then come along peaceable. If you don't I'll 'it you as 'ard as Gawd'll let me."

There seemed to be nothing for it but a scrap, and Lamancha, with a wary eye on the clubbed rifle, waited for his chance. He must settle this fellow so that he should be incapable of pursuit—a nice task for a respectable Cabinet Minister getting on in life. There was a pool beside his left foot, which was the source of one of the burns that ran down into the Sanctuary. Getting this between him and his adversary, he darted towards one end, checked, turned, and made to go round the other. The navy struck at him with the rifle,

and narrowly missed his head. Then he dropped the weapon, made a wild clutch, gripped Lamancha by the jacket, and with a sound of rending tweed dragged him to his arms. The next moment the two men were locked in a very desperate and unscientific wrestling bout.

It was a game Lamancha had never played in his life before. He was a useful boxer in his way, but of wrestling he was utterly ignorant, and so, happily, was the navy. So it became a mere contest of brute strength, waged on difficult ground with boulders, wells, and bog-holes adjacent. Lamancha had an athletic, well-trained body, the navy was powerful but ill-trained ; Lamancha was tired with eight or nine hours' scrambling, his opponent had also had a wearing morning ; but Lamancha had led a regular and comfortable life, while the navy had often gone supperless and had drunk many gallons of bad whisky. Consequently the latter, though the heavier and more powerful man, was likely to fail first in a match of endurance.

At the start, indeed, he nearly won straight away by the vigour of his attack. Lamancha cried out with pain as he felt his arm bent almost to breaking-point and a savage knee in his groin. The first three minutes it was anyone's fight ; the second three Lamancha began to feel a dawning assurance. The other's breath laboured, and his sudden spasms of furious effort grew shorter and easier to baffle. He strove to get his opponent on to the rougher ground, while that opponent manœuvred to keep the fight on the patch of grass, for it was obvious to him that his right course was to wear the navy down. There were no rules in this game, and it

would be of little use to throw him ; only by reducing him to the last physical fatigue could he have him at his mercy, and be able to make his own terms.

Presently the early fury of the man was exchanged for a sullen defence. Lamancha was getting very distressed himself, for the navy's great boots had damaged his shins and torn away strips of stocking and skin, while his breath was growing deplorably short. The two staggered around the patch of grass, never changing grips, but locked in a dull clinch into which they seemed to have been frozen. Lamancha would fain have broken free and tried other methods, but the navy's great hands held him like a vice, and it seemed as if their power, in spite of the man's gasping, would never weaken.

In this preposterous stalemate they continued for the better part of ten minutes. Then the navy, as soldiers say, resumed the initiative. He must have felt his strength ebbing, and in a moment of violent disquiet have decided to hazard everything. Suddenly Lamancha found himself forced away from the chosen ground and dragged into the neighbouring moraine. They shaved the pool, and in a second were stumbling among slabs and scree and concealed boulders. The man's object was plain : if he could make his lighter antagonist slip he might force him down in a place from which it would not be easy to rise.

But it was the navy who slipped. He lurched backward, tripping over a stone, and the two rolled into a cavity formed by a boulder which had been split by its fall from Sgurr Mór in some bygone

storm. It was three or four feet of a fall, and Lamancha fell with him. There was a cry from the navvy, and the grip of his arms slackened.

Lamancha scrambled out and looked back into the hole where the man lay bunched up as if in pain.

"Hurt?" he asked, and the answer came back, garnished with much profanity, that it was his — leg.

"I'm dashed sorry. Look here, this fight is off. Let me get you out and see what I can do for you."

The man, sullen but quiescent, allowed himself to be pulled out and laid on a couch of heather. Lamancha had feared for the thigh or the pelvis and was relieved to find that it was a clean break below the knee, caused by the owner's descent, weighted by his antagonist, on an ugly, sharp-edged stone. But, as he looked at the limp figure, haggard with toil and poor living, and realised that he had damaged it in the pitiful capital which was all it possessed, its bodily strength, he suffered from a pang of sharp compunction. He loathed John Macnab and all his works for bringing disaster upon a poor devil who had to earn his bread.

"I'm most awfully sorry," he stammered. "I wouldn't have had this happen for a thousand pounds. . . ." Then he broke off, for in the face now solemnly staring at him he recognised something familiar. Where had he seen that long crooked nose before and that cock of the eyebrows?

"Stokes," he cried, "you're Stokes, aren't you?" He recalled now the man who had once been his orderly, and whom he had last known as a smart troop sergeant.

The navvy tried to rise and failed. "You've got

my name right, guv'nor," he said, but it was obvious that in his eyes there was no recognition.

"You remember me—Lord Lamancha?" He had it all now—the fellow who had been a son of one of Tommy Deloraine's keepers—a decent fellow and a humorous, and a good soldier. It was like the cussedness of things that he should go breaking the leg of a friend.

"Gawd!" gasped the navvy, peering at the shameful figure of Lamancha, whose nether garments were now well advanced in raggedness and whose peat-begrimed face had taken on an added dirtiness from the heat of the contest. "I can't 'ardly believe it's you, sir." Then, with many tropes of speech, he explained what, had he known, would have happened to Lord Claybody, before he interfered with the game of a gentleman as he had served under.

"What brought you to this?" Lamancha asked.

"I've 'ad a lot of bad luck, sir. Nothing seemed to go right with me after the war. I found the missus 'ad done a bunk, and I 'ad the two kids on my 'ands, and there weren't no cushy jobs goin' for the likes of me. Gentlemen everywhere was puttin' down their 'osses, and I 'ad to take what I could get. So it come to the navvyin' with me, like lots of other chaps. The Gov'ment don't seem to care what 'appens to us poor Gawd-forgotten devils, sir."

The navvy stopped to cough, and Lamancha did not like the sound of it.

"How's your health?" he asked.

"Not so bad, barrin' a bit of 'oarseness."

"That explains a lot. You'll have consumption if you don't look out. If you had been the man you were five years ago you'd have had me on my back in two seconds. . . . I needn't tell you, Stokes, that I'm dashed sorry about this, and I'll do all I can to make it up to you. First, we must get that leg right."

Lamancha began by retrieving the rifle. It was a light, double-barrelled express which fortunately could be taken to pieces. He had some slight surgical knowledge, and was able to set the limb, and then with strips of his handkerchief and the rifle-barrel to put it roughly into a splint. Stokes appeared to have gone without breakfast, so he was given the few sandwiches which remained in Lamancha's pocket and a stiff dram from his flask. Soon the patient was reclining in comparative comfort on the heather, smoking Lamancha's tobacco in an ancient stump of a pipe, while the latter, with heavy brows, considered the situation.

"You ought to get to bed at once, for you've a devil of a bad cough, you know. And you ought to have a doctor to look after that leg properly, for this contraption of mine is a bit rough. The question is, how am I going to get you down? You can't walk, and you're too much of a heavy-weight for me to carry very far. Also I needn't tell you that this hill-side is not too healthy for me at present. I meant to go down it by crawling in the open and keeping to the gullies, but I can't very well do that with you. . . . It looks as if there is nothing for it but to wait here till dark. Then I'll nip over to Crask and send some men here with a stretcher."

Mr. Stokes declared that he was perfectly happy where he was, and deprecated the trouble he was giving.

"Trouble," cried Lamancha. "I caused the trouble, and I'm going to see you through it."

"But you'll get nabbed, sir, and there ain't no bloomin' good in my 'avin' my leg broke if Claybody's going to nab you along of it. You cut off, sir, and never 'eed me."

"I don't want to be nabbed, but I can't leave you. . . . Wait a minute! If I followed Wattie—that is my stalker—down to the Doran I could send a message to Crask about a stretcher and men to carry it. I might get some food too. And then I'll come back here, and we'll bukh about Palestine till it's time to go. . . . It might be the best way. . . ."

But, even as he spoke, further plans were put out of the question by the advent of six men who had come quietly through the Beallach from the Sanctuary, and had unostentatiously taken up position in a circle around the two ex-antagonists. Lamancha had been so engaged in Stokes's affairs that he had ceased to remember that he was in enemy territory.

His military service had taught him the value of the offensive. The new-comers were, he observed, three navvies, two men who were clearly gillies, and a warm and breathless young man in a suit of a dapperness startling on a wild mountain. This young man was advancing towards him with a determined eye when Lamancha arose from his couch and confronted him.

"Hullo!" he cried cheerfully, "you come just

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in time. This poor chap here has had a smash—
broken his leg—and I was wondering how I was to
get him down the hill.”

Johnson Claybody stopped short. He had rarely seen a more disreputable figure than that which had risen from the heather—dissolute in garments, wild of hair, muddy beyond belief in countenance. Yet these dilapidated clothes had once, very long ago, been made by a good tailor, and the fellow was apparently some kind of a gentleman. He was John Macnab beyond doubt, for in his hand was the butt-end of a rifle. Now Johnson was the type of man who is miserable if he feels himself ill-clad or dirty, and discovers in a sense of tidiness a moral superiority. He rejoiced to have found his enemy, and an enemy over whom he felt at a notable advantage. But, unfortunately for him, no Merkland had ever been conscious of the appearance he represented or cared a straw about it. Lamancha in rags would have cheerfully disputed with an emperor in scarlet, and suffered no loss of confidence because of his garb, since he would not have given it a thought. What he was considering at the moment was the future of the damaged Stokes.

“Who’s that?” Johnson asked peremptorily, pointing to the navvy.

His colleagues hastened to inform him. “It’s Jim Stokes,” one of the three navvies volunteered. “What ’ave you been doing to yourself, Jim?” And Macnicol added: “That’s the man that was to keep movin’ along this side o’ the hill, sir. I picked him, for he looked the soopiest.”

Then the faithful Stokes uplifted his voice. “I

done as I was told, sir, and kep' movin' all right, but I ain't seen nothing, and then I 'ad a nawsty fall among them blasted rocks and 'urt my leg. This gentleman comes along and finds me and 'as a try at patchin' me up. But for 'im, sir, I'd be lyin' jammed between two stones till the crows 'ad a pick at me."

"You're a good chap, Stokes," said Lamancha, "but you're a liar. This man," he addressed Johnson, "was carrying out your orders, and challenged me. I wanted to pass, and he wouldn't let me, so we had a rough-and-tumble, and through no fault of his he took a toss into a hole, and, as you see, broke his leg. I've set it and bound it up, but the sooner we get the job properly done the better. Hang it, it's the poor devil's livelihood. So we'd better push along."

His tone irritated Johnson. This scoundrelly poacher, caught red-handed with a rifle, presumed to give orders to his own men. He turned fiercely on Stokes.

"You know this fellow? What's his name?"

"I can't say as I rightly knows 'im," was the answer. "But 'im and me was in the war, and he once gave me a drink outside Jerusalem."

"Are you John Macnab?" Johnson demanded.

"I'm anything you please," said Lamancha, "if you'll only hurry and get this man to bed."

"Damn your impudence! What business is that of yours? You've been caught poaching and we'll march you down to Haripol and get the truth out of you. If you won't tell me who you are, I'll find means to make you. . . . Macnicol, you and Macqueen get on each side of him, and you three

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fellows follow behind. If he tries to bolt, club him. . . . You can leave this man here. He'll take no harm, and we can send back for him later."

"I'm sorry to interfere," said Lamancha quietly, "but Stokes is going down now. You needn't worry about me. I'll come with you, for I've got to see him comfortably settled."

"You'll come with us!" Johnson shouted. "Many thanks for your kindness. You'll damn well be made to come. Macnicol, take hold of him."

"Don't," said Lamancha. "Please don't. It will only mean trouble."

Macnicol was acutely unhappy. He recognised something in Lamancha's tone which was perhaps unfamiliar to his master—that accent which means authority, and which, if disregarded, leads to mischief. He had himself served in Lovat's Scouts, and the voice of this tatterdemalion was unpleasantly like that of certain high-handed officers of his acquaintance. So he hesitated and shuffled his feet.

"Look at the thing reasonably," Lamancha said. "You say I'm a poacher called John Something-or-other. I admit that you have found me walking with a rifle on your ground, and naturally you want an explanation. But all that can wait till we get this man down to a doctor. I won't run away, for I want to satisfy myself that he's going to be all right. Won't that content you?"

Johnson, to his disgust, felt that he was being manœuvred into a false position. He was by no means unkind, and this infernal Macnab was

making him appear a brute. Public opinion was clearly against him ; Macnicol was obviously unwilling to act, Macqueen he knew detested him, and the three navvies might be supposed to take the side of their colleague. Johnson set a high value on public opinion, and scrupled to outrage it. So he curbed his wrath, and gave orders that Stokes should be taken up. Two men formed a cradle with their arms, and the cortège proceeded down the hill-side.

Lamancha took care to give his captors no uneasiness. He walked beside Macqueen, with whom he exchanged a few comments on the weather, and he thought his own by no means pleasant thoughts. This confounded encounter with Stokes had wrecked everything, and yet he could not be altogether sorry that it had happened. He had a chance now of doing something for an honest fellow—Stokes's gallant lie to Johnson had convinced Lamancha of his superlative honesty. But it looked as if he were in for an ugly time with this young bounder, and he was beginning to dislike Johnson extremely. There were one or two points in his favour. The stag seemed to have departed with Wattie into the *ewigkeit*, and happily no eye at the Beallach had seen the signs of the gralloch. All that Johnson could do was to accuse him of poaching, *teste* the rifle ; he could not prove the deed. Lamancha was rather vague about the law, but he was doubtful whether mere trespass was a grave offence. Then the Claybodys would not want to make too much fuss about it, with the journalists booming the doings of John Macnab. . . . But wouldn't they ? They were the kind of

people that liked advertisement, and after all they had scored. What a tale for the cheap papers there would be in the capture of John Macnab! And if it got out who he was? . . . It was very clear that that at all costs must be prevented . . . Had Johnson Claybody any decent feelings to which he could appeal? A sportsman? Well, he didn't seem to be of much account in that line, for he had wanted to leave the poor devil on the hill.

It took some time for the party to reach the Doran, which they forded at a point considerably below Archie's former lair. Lamancha gave thanks for one mercy, that Archie and Wattie seemed to have got clean away. There was a car on the road which caused him a moment's uneasiness, till he saw that it was not the Ford but a large car with an all-weather body coming from Haripol. The driver seemed to have his instructions, for he turned round—no light task in that narrow road with its boggy fringes—and awaited their arrival.

Johnson gave rapid orders. "You march the fellow down the road, and bring the navvy—better take him to your cottage, Macqueen. I'll go home in the car and prepare a reception for Macnab."

It may be assumed that Johnson spoke in haste, for he had somehow to work off his irritation, and desired to assert his authority.

"Hadn't Stokes better go in the car?" Lamancha suggested in a voice which he strove to make urbane. "That journey down the hill can't have done his leg any good."

Johnson replied by telling him to mind his own business, and then was foolish enough to add that

he was hanged if he would have any lousy navvy in his car. He was preparing to enter, when something in Lamancha's voice stopped him.

"You can't," said the latter. "In common decency you can't."

"Who'll prevent me? Now, look here, I'm fed up with your insolence. You'll be well advised to hold your tongue till we make up our minds how to deal with you. You're in a devilish nasty position, Mr. John Macnab, if you had the wits to see it. Macnicol, and you fellows, I'll fire the lot of you if he escapes on the road. You've my authority to hit him on the head if he gets nasty."

Johnson's foot was on the step, when a hand on his shoulder swung him round.

"No, you don't." Lamancha's voice had lost all trace of civility, for he was very angry. "Stokes goes in the car and one of the gillies with him. Here, you, lift the man in."

Johnson had grown rather white, for he saw that the situation was working up to the ugliest kind of climax. He felt dimly that he was again defying public opinion, but his fury made him bold. He cursed Lamancha with vigour and freedom, but there was a slight catch in his voice, and a hint of anticlimax in his threats, for the truth was that he was a little afraid. Still it was a flat defiance, though it concluded with a sneering demand as to what and who would prevent him doing as he pleased, which sounded a little weak.

"First," said Lamancha, "I should have a try at wringing your neck. Then I should wreck any reputation you may have up and down this land. I promise you I should make you very sorry you

didn't stay in bed this morning." Lamancha had succeeded in controlling himself—in especial he had checked the phrase "infernal little haberdasher" which had risen to his lips—and his voice was civil and quiet again.

Johnson gave a mirthless laugh. "I'm not afraid of a dirty poacher."

"If I'm a poacher that's no reason why you should behave like a cad."

It is a melancholy fact which exponents of democracy must face that, while all men may be on a level in the eyes of the State, they will continue in fact to be preposterously unequal. Lamancha had been captured in circumstances of deep suspicion which he did not attempt to explain; he had been caught on Johnson's land, by Johnson's servants; the wounded man was in Johnson's pay, and might reasonably be held to be at Johnson's orders; the car was without question Johnson's own. Yet this outrageous trespasser was not only truculent and impenitent; he was taking it upon himself to give orders to gillies and navvies, and to dictate the use of an expensive automobile. The truth is that, if you belong to a family which for a good many centuries has been accustomed to command and to take risks, and if you yourself, in the forty-odd years of your life, have rather courted trouble than otherwise, and have put discipline into Arab caravans, Central African natives, and Australian mounted brigades—well, when you talk about wringing necks your words may carry weight. If, too, you have never had occasion to think of your position, because no one has ever questioned it, and you promise to break down somebody else's,

your threat may convince others, because you yourself are so wholly convinced of your power in that direction. It was the complete lack of bluster in Lamancha, his sober matter-of-factness, that made Johnson suddenly discover in this potato-bogle of a man something formidable. He hesitated, the gillies hesitated, and Lamancha saw his chance. Angry as he was, he contrived to be conciliatory.

"Don't let us lose our tempers. I've no right to dictate to you, but you must see that we're bound to look after this poor chap first. After that I'm at your disposal to give you any satisfaction you want."

Johnson had not been practised in commercial negotiations for nothing. He saw that obstinacy would mean trouble, and would gain him little, and he cast about for a way to save his face. He went through a show of talking in whispers to Macnicol—a show which did not deceive his head-stalker. Then he addressed Macqueen. "We think we'd better get this fellow off our hands. You take him down in the car to your cottage, and put him in your spare bed. Then come round to the house and wait for me."

"This is my show, if you'll allow me, sir," said Lamancha politely. He took a couple of notes from a wad he carried in an inner pocket. "Get hold of the nearest doctor—you can use the post-office telephone—and tell him to come at once, and get everything you need for Stokes. I'll see you again. Don't spare expense, for I'm responsible."

The car departed, and the walking party continued its way down the Doran glen. Lamancha's

anger was evaporating, philosophy had intervened, and he was prepared to make allowances for Johnson. But he recognised that the situation was delicate and the future cloudy, and, since he saw no way out, decided to wait patiently on events, always premising that on no account must he permit his identity to be discovered. That might yet involve violent action of a nature which he could not foresee. His consolation was the thought of the stag, now without doubt in the Crask larder. If only he could get clear of his captors, John Macnab would have won two out of the three events. Yes, and if Leithen and Palliser-Yeates had not blundered into captivity.

He was presently reassured as to the fate of the latter. When the party entered the wooded lower glen of the Doran it was joined by four weary navvies who had been refreshing themselves by holding their heads in the stream. Interrogated by Macnicol, they told a tale of hunting an elusive man for hours on the hill-side, of repeatedly being on the point of laying hold of him, of a demoniac agility and a diabolical cunning, and of his final disappearance into the deeps of the wood. Questioned about Stokes, they knew nothing. He had last been seen by them in the early morning when the mist first cleared, but it was his business to keep moving high up the hill near the rocks and he had certainly not joined in the chase when it started.

Johnson's temper was not improved by this news. Twice he had been put to public shame in front of his servants by this arrogant tramp who was John Macnab. He had been insulted and

defied, but he knew in his heart that the true bitterness lay in the fact that he had also been frightened. Anger, variegated by fear, is apt to cloud a man's common sense, and Johnson's usual caution was deserting him. He was beginning to see red, and the news that there had been an accomplice was the last straw. Somehow or other he must get even with this bandit and bring him to the last extremity of disgrace. He must get him inside the splendours of Haripol, where, his foot on his native heath, it would recover the confidence which had been so lamentably to seek on the hill. . . . He would, of course, hand him over to the police, but his soul longed for some more spectacular *dénouement*. . . .

Then he thought of the journalists, who had made such a nuisance of themselves in the morning. They were certain to be still about the place. If they could see his triumphant arrival at Haripol, they would write such a story as would blazon his credit to the world and make the frustrated poacher a laughing-stock.

As it chanced, as they entered one of the woodland drives of Haripol, they met the gillie, Andrew, on his way home for a late tea. He was asked if he had seen any of the correspondents, and replied that he and Peter and Cameron had captured one after a hard chase, who at the moment was in Cameron's charge and using strong language about the liberty of the Press. Andrew was privately despatched to bid Cameron bring his captive, with all civility and many apologies, up to the house, with a message that Mr. Claybody would be glad to have a talk with him. Then, with three navvies

as a vanguard and four as a rearguard, Lamancha was conducted down the glade between Johnson and Macnicol—the picture of a criminal in the grip of the law.

That picture was seen by a small boy who was lurking among the bracken. To the eyes of Benjie it spelt the uttermost disaster. The stag was safe at Crask, but the major part of John Macnab was in the hands of his enemies. Benjie thought hard for a minute, and then wriggled back into the covert and ran as hard as he could through the wood. To him at this awful crisis there seemed to be but a single hope. Force must be brought against force. The Bluidy Mackenzie, now tied up under a distant tree, must be launched upon the foe. The boy was aware that the dog had accepted him as an ally, but that it had developed for Lamancha the passion of its morose and solitary life.

The prisoner's uneasiness grew with every step he took down the sweet-scented twilit glade. He was being taken to the house, and in that house there would be people—women, perhaps—journalists, maybe—and a most embarrassing situation for a Cabinet Minister. The whole enterprise, which had been so packed with comedy and adventure, was about to end in fiasco and disgrace, and it was he, the promoter, who had let the show down. For the first time since he arrived at Crask Lamancha whole-heartedly wished himself out of the thing with a clean sheet. There was something to be said, after all, for a man keeping to his groove. . . .

They emerged from the trees, and before them stretched the lawns, with a large and important

mansion at the other end. This was worse than his wildest dreams. He stopped short.

"Look here," he said, "isn't it time to end this farce? I admit I was trespassing, and was fairly caught out. Isn't that enough?"

"By Gad, it isn't," said Johnson, into whose bosom a certainty of triumph and revenge had at last entered. "Into the house you go, and there we'll get the truth out of you."

"I'll pay any fine in reason, but I'm damned if I'm going near that house."

For answer, Johnson nodded to Macnicol, and the two closed in on the prisoner. Lamancha, now really desperate, shook off the stalker and was about to break to his left, when Johnson tackled high and held him.

At the same moment the Bluidy Mackenzie took a hand in the game.

That faithful hound, conducted by Benjie, had just arrived on the scene of action. He saw his adored Lamancha, the first man who had really understood him, being assaulted by another whose appearance he did not favour. Like a stone from a sling he leaped from the covert straight at Mr. Johnson Claybody's throat.

It all happened in one crowded instant. Lamancha felt the impact of part of Mackenzie's body, saw Johnson stagger and fall, and next observed his captor running wildly for the house with Mackenzie hot on his trail. Then, with that preposterous instinct to help human against animal which is deeper than reason, he started after him.

Never had a rising young commercial magnate

shown a better gift of speed, for a mad dog was his private and particular fear, and this beast was clearly raving mad. Macnicol and the navvies were some twenty yards behind, but Lamancha was a close second. Crying hoarsely, Johnson leaped the flower-beds and doubled like a hare in and out of a pergola. Ahead lay his mother's pet new lily-pond, and, remembering dimly that mad dogs did not love water, he plunged into it, and embraced a lead Cupid in the centre.

Mackenzie loved water like a spaniel, and his great body shot after him. But the immersion caused a second's delay and enabled Lamancha to take a flying leap which brought him almost atop of the dog. He clutched his collar and swung him back, making a commotion in the fountain like a tidal wave. Mackenzie recognised his friend and did not turn on him, but he still strained furiously after Johnson, who was now emerging like Proteus on the far side.

Suddenly the windows of the house, which was not thirty yards off, opened, and the stage filled up with figures. First the amazed eyes of Lamancha saw Crossby entering from the right, evidently a prisoner, in the charge of two gillies. Then at one set of windows appeared Sir Edward Leithen with a scared face, while from the other emerged the forms of Sir Archibald Roylance, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, and a stout gentleman in a kilt who might be Lord Claybody. To his mind, keyed by wrath and confusion to expectation of tragedy, there could only be one solution. Others besides himself had failed, and the secret of John Macnab was horridly patent to the world.

" Archie," he panted, " for God's sake call off your tripe-hound. I can't hold him any longer. . . . He'll eat that little man."

Lord Claybody had unusual penetration. He observed his son and heir dripping and exhausted on the turf, and a figure, which looked like a caricature in the *Opposition Press* of an eminent Tory statesman, surrendering a savage hound to a small and dirty boy. Also he saw in the background a group of gillies and navvies. There was mystery here which had better be unriddled away from the gaze of the profane crowd. His eye caught Crossby's and Lamanca's.

" I think you'd better all come indoors," he said.

XLIII: HARIPOL—THE ARMISTICE

THE great drawing-room had lost its garishness with the approach of evening. Facing eastward, it looked out on lawns now dreaming in a green dusk, though beyond them the setting sun, over-topping the house, washed the woods and hills with gold and purple. Lady Claybody sat on a brocaded couch with something of the dignity of the late Queen Victoria, mystified, perturbed, awaiting the explanation which was her due. Her husband stood before her, a man with such an air of being ready for any emergency that even his kilt looked workmanlike. The embarrassed party from Crask clustered in the background; the shameful figures of Lamanca and Johnson stood in front of the window, thereby deepening the shadow. So electric was the occasion that Lady Claybody, finically proud of her house, did not notice that

these two were oozing water over the polished parquet and devastating more than one expensive rug.

Lamancha, now that the worst had happened, was resigned and almost cheerful. Since the Claybodys had bagged Leithen and Palliser-Yeates and detected the complicity of Sir Archie, there was no reason why he should be left out. He hoped, rather vaguely, that his captors might not be inclined to make the thing public in view of certain episodes, but he had got to the pitch of caring very little. John Macnab was dead, and only awaited sepulture and oblivion. He looked towards Johnson, expecting him to take up the tale.

But Johnson had no desire to speak. He had been very much shaken and scared by the Bluidy Mackenzie and had not yet recovered his breath. Also a name spoken by his father, as they entered the room, had temporarily unsettled his wits. It was Lord Claybody who broke the uncomfortable silence.

"Who owns that dog?" he asked, looking, not at Lamancha, but at his son.

"The brute's mine," said Archie penitently. "He followed the car, and I left him tied up. Can't think how he got loose and started this racket."

The master of the house turned to Lamancha. "How did you come here, my lord? You look as if you had been having a rough journey."

Lamancha laughed. Happily the waning light did not reveal the full extent of his dirt and raggedness. "I have," he said. "I'm your son's prisoner. Fairly caught out. I daresay you think

me an idiot, unless Leithen or Palliser-Yeates has explained."

Lord Claybody looked more mystified than ever. "I don't understand. A prisoner?"

"He's John Macnab," put in Johnson, whose breath was returning, and with it sulkiness. He was beginning to see that there was to be no triumph in this business, and a good deal of unpleasant explanation.

"Well, a third of him," said Lamancha. "And as you've already annexed the other two-thirds you have the whole of the fellow under your roof."

Lord Claybody's gasp suddenly revealed to Lamancha that he had been premature in his confession. How his two friends had got into the Haripol drawing-room he did not know, but apparently it was not as prisoners. The mischief was done, however, and there was no going back.

"You mean to say that you three gentlemen are John Macnab? You have been poaching at Glenraden and Strathlarrig? Does Colonel Raden—does Mr. Bandicott know who you are?"

Lamancha nodded. "They found out after we had had our shot at their preserves. They didn't mind—took it very well indeed. We hope you're going to follow suit?"

"But I am amazed. You had only to send me a note and my forest was at your disposal for as long as you wished. Why—why this—this incivility?"

"I assure you, on my honour, that the last thing we dreamed of was incivility. . . . Look here, Lord Claybody, I wonder if I can explain. We three—Leithen, Palliser-Yeates, and myself—found ourselves two months ago fairly fed up with life. We

weren't sick, and we weren't tired—only bored. By accident we discovered each other's complaint, and we decided to have a try at curing ourselves by attempting something very difficult and rather dangerous. There was a fellow called Tarras used to play this game—he was before your time—and we resolved to take a leaf out of his book. So we quartered ourselves on Archie—he's not to blame, remember, for he's been protesting bitterly all along—and we sent out our challenge. Glenraden and Strathlarrig accepted it, so that was all right ; you didn't in so many words, but you accepted it by your action, for you took elaborate precautions to safeguard your ground. . . . Well, that's all. Palliser-Yeates lost at Glenraden owing to Miss Janet. Leithen won at Strathlarrig, and now I've made a regular hat of things at Haripol. But we're cured, all of us. We're simply longing to get back to the life which in July we thought humbug."

Lord Claybody sat down in a chair and brooded.

"I still don't follow," he said. "You are people who matter a great deal to the world, and there's not a man in this country who wouldn't have been proud to give you the chance of the kind of holiday you needed. You're one of the leaders of my party. Personally, I have always considered you the best of them. I'm looking to Sir Edward Leithen to win a big case for me this autumn. Mr. Palliser-Yeates has done a lot of business with my firm, and after the talk I've had with him this afternoon I expect to do a good deal more with him in the future. You had only to give me a hint of what you wished and I would have jumped at the chance of obliging you. You wanted the thrill of feeling like poachers.

Well, I would have seen that you got it. I would have turned on every man in the place and used all my wits to make your escapade difficult. Wouldn't that have contented you?"

"No, no," Lamanca cried. "You are missing the point. Don't you see that your way would have taken all the gloss off the adventure and made it a game? We had to feel that we were taking real risks—that, being what we were, we should look utter fools if we were caught and exposed."

"Pardon me, but it is you who are missing the point." Lord Claybody was smiling. "You could never have been exposed—except perhaps by those confounded journalists," he added as he caught sight of Crossby.

"We had the best of them on our side," Lamanca put in. "Mr. Crossby has backed us up nobly."

"Well, that only made your position more secure. Colonel Raden and Mr. Bandicott accepted your challenge, and in any case they were sportsmen, and you knew it. If they had caught one or the other of you they would never have betrayed you. You must see that. And here at Haripol you were on the safest ground of all. I'm not what they call a sportsman—not yet—but I couldn't give you away. Do you think it conceivable that I would do anything to weaken the public prestige of a statesman I believe in, a great lawyer I brief, and a great banker whose assistance is of the utmost value to me. I'm a man who has made a fortune by my own hard work and I mean to keep it; therefore in these bad times I am out to support anything which buttresses the solid structure of society.

You three are part of that structure. You might poach every stag on Haripol, and I should still hold my tongue."

Lamancha, regardless of the condition of his nether garments, sat down heavily on an embroidered stool which Lady Claybody erroneously believed to have belonged to Marie Antoinette, and dropped his head in his hands.

"Lord, I believe you're right," he groaned. "We've all been potting at sitting birds. John, do you hear? We've been making godless fools of ourselves. We thought we had got outside civilisation and were really taking chances. But we weren't. We were all the time as safe as your blessed bank. It can't be done—not in this country anyway. We're in the groove and have got to stay there. We've been a pretty lot of idiots not to think of that."

Then Johnson spoke. He had been immensely cheered by Lord Claybody's words, for they had seemed to raise Haripol again to that dignity from which it had been in imminent risk of falling.

"I don't complain personally, Lord Lamancha, though you've given me a hard day of it. But I agree with my father—you really were gambling on a certainty and it wasn't very fair to us. Besides, you three, who are the supporters of law and order, have offered a pretty good handle to the enemy, with those infernal journalists advertising John Macnab. There may be a large crop of Macnabs springing up, and you'll be responsible. It's a dangerous thing to weaken the sanctities of property."

He found, to his surprise, a vigorous opponent in

his mother. Lady Claybody had passed from mystification to enlightenment and from enlightenment to appreciation. It delighted her romantic soul that Haripol should have been chosen for the escapade of three eminent men; she saw tradition and legend already glorifying her new dwelling. Moreover, she scented in Johnson's words a theory of life which was not her own, a mercantile creed which conflicted with her notion of Haripol, and of the future of her family.

"You are talking nonsense, Johnson," she said. "You are making property a nightmare, for you are always thinking about it. You forget that wealth is made for man, and not man for wealth. It is the personality that matters. It is so vulgar not to keep money and land and that sort of thing in its proper place. Look at those splendid old Jacobites and what they gave up. The one advantage of property is that you can disregard it."

This astounding epigram passed unnoticed save by Janet, for the lady, smiling benignly on the poaching trinity, went on to a practical application. "I think the whole John Macnab adventure has been quite delightful. It has brightened us all up, and I'm sure we have nothing to forgive. I think we must have a dinner for everybody concerned to celebrate the end of it. What Claybody says is perfectly true—you must have known you could count on us, just as much as on Colonel Raden and Mr. Bandicott. But since you seem not to have realised that, you have had the fun of thinking you were in real danger, and after all it is what one thinks that matters. I am so glad you are all cured of being bored. But I'm not quite happy about those

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journalists. How can we be certain that they won't make a horrid story of it? "

"My wife is right," said Lord Claybody emphatically. "That is the danger." He looked at Crossby. "They are certain to want some kind of account."

"They certainly will," said the latter. "And that account must leave out names and—and other details. I don't suppose you want the navvy business made public? "

"Perhaps not. That was Johnson's idea, and I don't consider it a particularly happy inspiration."

"Well, there is nothing for it but that I should give them the story and expurgate it discreetly. John Macnab has been caught and dismissed with a warning—that's all there is to it. I suppose your gillies won't blab? They can't know very much, but they might give away some awkward details."

"I'll jolly well see that they don't," said Johnson. "But who will you make John Macnab out to be? "

"A lunatic—unnamed. I'll hint at some family skeleton into which good breeding forbids me to inquire. The fact that he has failed at Haripol will take the edge off my colleagues' appetites. If he had got his stag they would have been ramping on the trail. The whole thing will go the way of other stunts, and be forgotten in two days. I know the British Press."

Within half an hour the atmosphere in that drawing-room had changed from suspicion to something not far from friendliness, but the change left two people unaffected. Johnson, doubtless with Lamancha's behaviour on the hill in his memory,

was still sullen, and Janet was obviously ill at ease.

Lamancha, who was suffering a good deal from thirst and hunger and longed for a bath, arose from his stool.

"I think," he said, "that we three—especially myself—owe you the most abject apologies. I see now that we were taking no risks worth mentioning, and that what we thought was an adventure was only a *faux pas*. It was abominably foolish, and we are all very sorry about it. I think you've taken it uncommonly well."

Lord Claybody raised a protesting hand. "Not another word. I vote we break up this conference and give you something to drink. Johnson's tongue is hanging out of his mouth."

The voice of Janet was suddenly raised, and in it might have been detected a new timidity. "I want to apologise also. Dear Lady Claybody, I stole your dog. . . . I hope you will forgive me. You see we wanted to do something to distract Macnicol, and that seemed the only way."

A sudden silence fell. Lady Claybody, had there been sufficient light, might have been observed to flush.

"You—stole—Rogueie," she said slowly, while Janet moved closer to Sir Archie. "You—stole—Wee Rogueie. I think you are the——"

"But we were very kind to him, and he was very happy."

"I wasn't happy. I scarcely slept a wink. What right had you to touch my precious little dog? I think it is the most monstrous thing I ever heard in my life."

"I'm so very sorry. Please, please forgive me."

But you said yourself that the only advantage of property was that you could disregard it."

Lady Claybody, to her enormous credit, stared, gaped, and then laughed. Then something in the attitude of Janet and Archie stopped her, and she asked suddenly: "Are you two engaged?"

"Yes," said Janet, "since ten minutes past one this afternoon."

Lady Claybody rose from the couch and took her in her arms.

"You're the wickedest girl in the world and the most delightful. Oh, my dear, I am so pleased. Sir Archibald, you will let an old woman kiss you. You are brigands, both of you, so you should be very very happy. You must all come and dine here to-morrow night—your father and sister too, and we'll ask the Bandicotts. It will be a dinner to announce your engagement, and also to say good-bye to John Macnab. Poor John! I feel as if he were a real person who will always haunt this glen, and now he is disappearing into the mist."

"No," said Lamancha, "he is being shrivelled up by coals of fire. By the way"—and he turned to Lord Claybody—"I'll send over the stag in the morning. I forgot to tell you I got a stag—an old beast with a famous head, who used to visit Crask. It will look rather well in your hall. It has been in Archie's larder since the early afternoon."

Then Johnson Claybody was moved to a course which surprised his audience, and may have surprised himself. His sullenness vanished in hearty laughter.

"I think," he said, "I have made rather a fool of myself."

"I think we have all made fools of ourselves," said Lamancha.

Johnson turned to his late prisoner and held out his hand.

"Lord Lamancha, I have only one thing to say. I don't in the least agree with my mother, and I'm dead against John Macnab. But I'm your man from this day on—whatever line you take. You're my leader, for, by all that's holy, you've a most astonishing gift of getting the goods."

XLIV: EPILOGUE

CROSSBY, from whom I had most of this narrative, was as good as his word, though it went sorely against the grain. He himself wrote a tale, and circulated his version to his brother journalists, which made a fair enough yarn, but was a sad anticlimax to the Return of Harald Blacktooth. He told of a gallant but frustrated attempt on the Haripol Sanctuary, the taking of the culprit, and the magnanimous release by young Mr. Claybody of a nameless monomaniac—a gentleman, it was hinted, who had not recovered from the effects of the war. The story did not occupy a prominent page in the papers, and presently, as he had prophesied, the world had forgotten John Macnab, and had turned its attention to the cinema star, just arrived in London, whom for several days, to the disgust of that lady's agents, it had strangely neglected.

The dinner at Haripol, Crossby told me, was a hilarious function, at which four men found reason to modify their opinion of the son of the house, and

the host fell in love with Janet, and Archie with his hostess. There is talk, I understand, of making it an annual event to keep green the memory of the triune sportsman who once haunted the place. If you go to Haripol, as I did last week, you will see above the hall chimney a noble thirteen-pointer, and a legend beneath proclaiming that the stag was shot on the Sgurr Dearg beat of the forest by the Earl of Lamanca on a certain day of September in a certain year. Lady Claybody, who does not like stags' heads as ornaments, makes an exception of this : indeed, it is the one of her household treasures to which she most often calls her guests' attention.

Janet and Archie were married in November in the little kirk of Inverlarrig, and three busy men cancelled urgent engagements to be there. Among the presents there was one not shown to the public or mentioned in the papers, and a duplicate of it went to Junius and Agatha at their wedding in the following spring. It was a noble loving-cup in the form of a quaich, inscribed as the gift of John Macnab. Below four signatures were engraved—Lamanca, Edward Leithen and John Palliser-Yeates, and last, in a hand of surprising boldness, the honoured name of Benjamin Bogle.

GAP *Handwritten* THE
CURTAINN THE
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XLV: WHITSUNTIDE AT FLAMBARD

" Si la conscience qui sommeille dans l'instinct se réveillait, s'il s'intériorisait en connaissance au lieu de s'extérioriser en action, si nous savions l'interroger et s'il pouvait répondre, il nous livrerait les secrets de la vie."—BERGSON, L'Evolution Créatrice.

" ' But no ! ' cried Mr. Mantalini. ' It is a demn'd horrid dream. It is not reality. No ! ' "—*Nicholas Nickleby.*

I

AS I took my place at the dinner-table I realised that I was not the only tired mortal in Lady Flambard's Whitsuntide party. Mayot, who sat opposite me, had dark pouches under his eyes and that unwholesome high complexion which in a certain type of physique means that the arteries are working badly. I knew that he had been having a heavy time in the House of Commons over the Committee stage of his Factory Bill. Charles Ottery, who generally keeps himself fit with fives and tennis, and has still the figure of an athletic schoolboy, seemed nervous and out of sorts, and scarcely listened to his companion's chatter. Our hostess had her mid-season look ; her small delicate features were as sharp as a pin, and her blue eyes were drained of colour. But it was Arnold Tavanger farther down the table who held my attention. His heavy sagacious face was a dead mask of exhaustion. He looked done to the world and likely to fall asleep over his soup.

It was a comfort to me to see others in the same case, for I was feeling pretty near the end of my tether. Ever since Easter I had been overworked

out of all reason. There was a batch of important Dominion appeals before the Judicial Committee, in every one of which I was engaged, and I had some heavy cases in the Commercial Court. Of the two juniors who did most of my "devilling" one had a big patent-law action of his own, and the other was in a nursing-home with appendicitis. To make matters worse, I was chairman of a Royal Commission which was about to issue its findings, and had had to rewrite most of the report with my own hand, and I had been sitting as a one-man Commission in a troublesome dispute in the ship-building trade. Also I was expected to be pretty regularly in the House of Commons to deal with the legal side of Mayot's precious Bill, and the sittings had often stretched far into the next morning.

There is something about a barrister's spells of overwork which makes them different in kind from those of other callings. His duties are specific as to time and place. He must be in court at a certain hour. He must be ready to put, or reply to, an argument when he is called upon; he can postpone or rearrange his work only within the narrowest limits. He is a cog in an inexorable machine and must revolve with the rest of it. For myself I usually enter upon a period of extreme busyness with a certain lift of spirit, for there is a sporting interest in not being able to see your way through your work. But presently this goes, and I get into a mood of nervous irritation. It is easy enough to be a cart-horse, and it is easy enough to be a race-horse, but it is difficult to be a cart-horse which is constantly being asked to take Grand

National fences. One has to rise to hazards, but with each the take-off gets worse and the energy feebler. So at the close of such a spell I am in a wretched condition of soul and body—wearied but without power to rest, and with a mind so stale that it sees no light or colour in anything. Even the end of the drudgery brings no stimulus. I feel that my form has been getting steadily poorer, and that virtue has gone out of me which I may never recapture.

I had been in two minds about accepting Sally Flambard's invitation. She is my very good friend, but her parties are rather like a *table d'hôte*. Her interests are multitudinous, and all are reflected in her hospitality, so that a procession goes through her house which looks like a rehearsal for the Judgment Day. Politics, religion, philanthropy, letters, science, art and the most brainless fashion—she takes them all to her capacious heart. She is an innocent lion-hunter, too, and any man or woman who figures for the moment in the Press will be a guest at Flambard. And she drives her team, for all are put through their paces. Sally makes her guests work for their entertainment. In her own way she is a kind of genius, and what Americans call a wonderful "mixer." Everyone has got to testify, and I have seen her make a bishop discourse on Church union and a mathematician on hyper-space to an audience which heard of the topics for the first time. The talk is apt to be a little like a magazine page in a popular newspaper—very good fun, if you are feeling up to it, but not quite the thing for a rest-cure.

It was my memory of Flambard itself that

decided me. The place is set amid the greenest and quietest country on earth. The park is immense, and in early June is filled with a glory of flowers and blossoming trees. I could borrow one of Evelyn's horses and ride all day through the relics of ancient forests, or up on to the cool, windy spaces of the Downs. There was good dry-fly fishing in the little Arm, which runs through a shallow vale to the young Thames. At Whitsuntide you can recover an earlier England. The flood of greenery hides modern blemishes which are revealed by the bareness of winter, and an upland water-meadow is to-day just as it met the eye of the monks when they caught their Friday's trout, or of the corsleted knights as they rode out to the King's wars. It is the kind of scene that comforts me most, for there, as some poet says, "old Leisure sits knee-deep in grass." Also the house is large enough for peace. It is mostly Restoration period, with some doubtful Georgian additions, but there is a Tudor wing, the remnant of the old house, which the great Earl of Essex once used as a hunting-lodge. Sally used to give me a room at the top of the Essex wing, with a wide prospect north into the Cotswold dales. The hall and the drawing-rooms and the great terrace might be as full of "turns" as a music-hall stage, but somewhere in the house fatigue could find sanctuary.

I had arrived just in time to dress for dinner, and had spoken to none of my fellow-guests, so my inspection of the table had a speculative interest. It was a large party, and I saw a good many faces that I knew. There were the Nantleys, my best of friends, and their daughter Pamela, who was in her

first season. . . . There was old Folliot, the bore of creation, with his little grey imperial, and his smirk, and his tired eyes. He was retailing some ancient scandal to Mrs. Lamington, who was listening with one ear and devoting the other to what Lady Altrincham was saying across the table. George Lamington a little farther down was arguing with his host about the Ascot entries—his puffy red face had that sudden shrewdness which it acquires when George's mind is on horses. . . . There was a man opposite him of whom I could only catch the profile—a dark head with fine-drawn features. I heard his voice, a pleasant voice, with full deep tones like a tragic actor's, and, as he turned, I had an impression of a face full of swift, nervous strength. . . . There was a good deal of youth in the party, four girls besides Pamela Brune, and several boys with sleek hair and fresh voices. One of them I knew, Reggie Daker, who was a friend of my nephew's.

I was on Sally's left hand, and as she was busy with Mayot and the lady on my left was deep in a controversy with her neighbour over some book, I was free to look about me. Suddenly I got a queer impression. A dividing line seemed to zigzag in and out among us, separating the vital from the devitalised. There was a steady cackle of talk, but I felt that there were silent spaces in it. Most of the people were cheerful, eupeptic souls who were enjoying life. The Nantleys, for example, sedate country gentlefolk, whose days were an ordered routine of pleasant cares. . . . Pamela Brune? I was not so sure of her, for a young girl's first season is a trying business, like a boy's first half at

school. . . . Old Folliot, beyond doubt—he was perfectly happy as long as he was in a great house with somebody to listen to his archaic gossip. . . . Evelyn Flambard and George Lamington and the boys who were talking Ascot and next winter's hunting plans. . . . Lady Altrincham, sixty but with the air of thirty, who lives for her complexion and her famous pearls. . . . But I realised that there were people here who were as much at odds with life as myself—Mayot and Tavanger and Charles Ottery, and perhaps the dark fellow who sat opposite George Lamington.

Sally turned to me, hiding a yawn with her small hand. Her head on its slim neck was as erect as a bird's, and her body had a darting, bird-like poise, but I could see that the poise required some effort to maintain it. She patted my sleeve in her friendly way.

"I'm so glad you came," she said. "I know you want a rest." She screwed up her eyes and peered at me. "You look as if you hadn't been in bed for a month!"

"I'm nearly all out," I said. "You must let me moon about by myself, please, for I'm no sort of company for anybody."

"You shall do exactly as you like. I'm pretty tired also, and I'm giving a ball next week and there's Ascot looming ahead. Happily we're having quite a small party—and a very quiet one."

"Is this the lot?" I asked, looking down the table. I knew her habit of letting guests appear in relays during a week-end till the result was a mob.

"Practically. You know all the people?"

"Most of them. Who's the dark fellow opposite George Lamington?"

Her face brightened into interest. "That's my new discovery. A country neighbour, no less—but a new breed altogether. His name is Goodeve—Sir Robert Goodeve. He has just succeeded to the place and title."

Of course I knew Goodeve, that wonderful moated house in the lap of the Downs, but I had never met one of the race. I had had a notion that it had died out. The Goodeves are one of those families about which genealogists write monographs, a specimen of that unennobled gentry which is the oldest stock in England. They had been going on in their undistinguished way since Edward the Confessor.

"Tell me about him," I said.

"I can't tell you much. You can see what he looks like. Did you ever know a face so lit up from behind? . . . He was the son of a parson in Northumberland, poor as a church-mouse, so he had to educate himself. Local grammar school, some provincial university, and then with scholarships and tutoring he fought his way to Oxford. There he was rather a swell, and made friends with young Marburg, old Isaac's son, who got him a place in his father's business. The War broke out, and he served for four years, while Marburgs kept his job open. After that they moved him a good deal about the world, and he was several years in their New York house. It is really a romance, for at thirty-five he had made money, and now at thirty-eight he has inherited Goodeve and a good deal more. . . . Yes, he's a bachelor. Not rich as

the big fortunes go, but rich enough. The thing about him is that he has got his jumping-off ground reasonably young, and is now about to leap. Quite modest, but perfectly confident, and terribly ambitious. He is taking up politics, and I back him to make you all sit up. I think he's the most impressive mortal I have ever met. Bored stiff with women—as stony-hearted as you, Ned. He's a sort of ascetic, vowed to a cause."

"His own career?" I asked.

"No. No. He's not a bit of an egotist. There's a pent-up force that's got to come out. He's a fanatic about some new kind of Empire development, and I know people who think him a second Rhodes. I want you to make friends with him and tell me what you think, for in your fish-like way you have good judgment."

Sally yawned again, and I respected more than ever the courage of women who can go on till they drop and keep smiling. She turned away in response to a question of Mayot's, and I exchanged banalities with the lady on my other side. Presently I found myself free again to look round the table. I was right: we were the oddest mixture of the fresh and the *blasé*, the care-free and the care-worn. To look at Tavanger's hollow eyes and hear in one's ear the babble of high young voices made a contrast which was almost indecent. . . . I had a feeling as if we were all on a vast comfortable raft in some unknown sea, and that, while some were dancing to jazz music, others were crowding silently at the edge, staring into the brume ahead. Staring anxiously, too, for in that mist there might be fearful as well as wonderful things. . . . I

found myself studying George Lamington's face, and felt a childish dislike of him. His life was so padded and cosseted and bovine. He had just inherited another quarter of a million from an uncle, and he had not the imagination of a rabbit in the use of money. Why does wealth make dull people so much duller? I had always rather liked George, but now I felt him intolerable. I must have been very tired, for I was getting as full of silly prejudices as a minor poet.

Sally was speaking again, as she collected eyes.

"Don't be afraid. This is going to be a very peaceful party."

"Will you promise me," I said, "that I won't come down to-morrow and find half a dozen new faces at breakfast?"

"Honest Injun," she replied. "They are all here except one, and he arrives to-night."

When the women had gone Evelyn Flambard brought his port to my side. Having exhausted horses during dinner, he regaled me with the Englishman's other main topic, politics. Evelyn despaired of the republic. He had grievances against the Budget, the new rating law, and the Government's agricultural policy. He was alarmed about the condition of India, where he had served in his old Hussar days, and about Egypt, where he had large investments. His views on America were calculated to make a serious breach between the two sections of the Anglo-Saxon race. But if he feared the Government he despised the Opposition, though for politeness' sake he added that his strictures did not apply to me. There was no honest Toryism

left, so his plaint ran ; there was not a pin to choose between the parties ; they were all out to rob struggling virtue—meaning himself and other comfortable squires. He nodded down the table towards Goodeve. “ Look at that chap,” he whispered darkly. “ I mean to say, he don’t care a straw what he says or does, and he’ll have Tommy Twiston’s seat, which is reckoned the safest in England. He as good as told George Lamington this afternoon that he’d like to see a Soviet Government in power for a week in England under strict control, for it was the only way to deal with men like him. Hang it all, there’s nothing wrong with old George except that he’s a bit fussy, if you see what I mean.”

I said that I rather agreed with Goodeve, and that set Evelyn pouring out his woes to the man on the other side. Reggie Daker had come up next me, his eye heavy with confidences. I had acted as a sort of father-confessor to Reggie ever since he came down from the University, but I hadn’t much credit by my disciple. He was infinitely friendly, modest and good-humoured, but as hard to hold as a knotless thread. Usually he talked to me about his career, and I had grown very tired of finding him jobs, which he either shied off or couldn’t hold for a week. Now it seemed that this was not his trouble. He had found his niche at last, and it was dealing in rare books. Reggie considered that a lad like himself, with a fine taste and a large acquaintance, could make a lot of money by digging out rarities from obscure manor-houses and selling them to American collectors. He had taken up the study very seriously, he told

me, and he actually managed to get a few phrases of bibliophil's jargon into his simple tale. He felt that he had found his life's work, and was quite happy about it.

The trouble was Pamela Brune. It appeared that he was deeply in love, and that she was toying with his young heart. "There's a strong lot of entries," he explained, "and Charles Ottery has been the favourite up till now. But she seems a bit off Charles, and . . . and . . . anyhow, I'm going to try my luck. I wangled an invitation here for that very purpose. I say, you know—you're her godfather, aren't you? If you could put in a kind word . . ."

But my unreceptive eye must have warned Reggie that I was stony soil. He had another glass of port, and sighed.

I intended to go to bed as soon as I decently could. I was not sleepy, but I was seeing things with the confusion of a drowsy man. As I followed my host across the hall, where someone had started a gramophone, I seemed more than ever to be in a phantasmal world. The drawing-room, with the delicate fluted pilasters in its paneling and the Sir Joshuas and Romneys between them, swam in a green dusk, which was partly the afterglow through the uncurtained windows and partly the shading of the electric lamps. A four at bridge had been made up, and the young people were drifting back towards the music. Lady Nantley beckoned me from a sofa. I could see her eyes appraising my face and disapproving of it, but she was too tactful to tell me that I looked ill.

"I heard that you were to be here, Ned," she said, "and I was very glad. Your god-daughter is rather a handful just now, and I wanted your advice."

"What's wrong?" I asked. "She's looking uncommonly pretty." I caught a glimpse of Pamela patting her hair as she passed a mirror, slim and swift as a dryad.

"She's uncommonly perverse. You know that she has been having an affair with Charles Ottery ever since Christmas at Wirlesdon. I love Charles, and Tom and I were delighted. Everything most suitable—the right age, enough money, chance of a career, the same friends. There's no doubt that Charles adores her, and till the other day I thought that she was coming to adore Charles. But now she has suddenly gone off at a tangent, and has taken to snubbing and neglecting him. She says that he's too good for her, and that his perfections choke her—doesn't want to play second fiddle to an Admirable Crichton—wants to shape her own life—all the rubbish that young people talk nowadays."

Mollie's charming eyes were full of real distress, and she put an appealing hand on my arm.

"She likes you, Ned, and believes in you. Couldn't you put a little sense into her head?"

I wanted to say that I was feeling like a ghost from another sphere, and that it was no good asking a tenuous spectre to meddle with the affairs of warm flesh and blood. But I was spared the trouble of answering by the appearance of Lady Flambard.

"Forgive me, Mollie dear," she said, "but I

must carry him off. I'll bring him back to you presently."

She led me to a young man who was standing near the door. "Bob," she said, "this is Sir Edward Leithen. I've been longing for you two to meet."

"So have I," said the other, and we shook hands. Now that I saw Goodeve fairly, I was even more impressed than by his profile as seen at dinner. He was a finely made man, and looked younger than his thirty-eight years. He was very dark, but not in the least swarthy; there were lights in his hair which suggested that he might have been a blond child, and his skin was a clear brown, as if the blood ran strongly and cleanly under it. What I liked about him was his smile, which was at once engaging and natural and a little shy. It took away any arrogance that might have lurked in the tight mouth and straight brows.

"I came here to meet you, sir," he said. "I'm a candidate for public life, and I wanted to see a man who interests me more than anybody else in the game. I hope you don't mind my saying that. . . . What about going into the garden? There's a moon of sorts, and the nightingales will soon begin. If they're like the ones at Goodeve, eleven's their hour."

We went through the hall to the terrace, which lay empty and quiet in a great dazzle of moonlight. It was only about a fortnight till midsummer, a season when in fine weather in southern England it is never quite dark. Now, with a moon nearing the full, the place was bright enough to read print. The stone balustrade and urns were white as snow,

and the two stairways that led to the sunk garden were a frosty green like tiny glaciers.

We threaded the maze of plots and lily-ponds and came out on a farther lawn, which ran down to the little river. That bit of the Arm is no good for fishing, for it has been trimmed into a shallow babbling stretch of ornamental water, but it is a delicious thing in the landscape. There was no sound except the lapse of the stream, and the occasional squattering flight of a moorhen. But as we reached the brink a nightingale began in the next thicket.

Goodeve had scarcely spoken a word. He was sniffing the night scents, which were a wonderful blend of early roses, new-mown hay, and dewy turf. When we reached the Arm, we turned and looked back at the house. It seemed suddenly to have gone small, set in a great alley-way of green between olive woods, an alley-way which swept from the high downs to the river meadows. Far beyond it we could see the bare top of Stobarrow. But it looked as perfect as a piece of carved ivory—and ancient, ancient as a boulder left milleniums ago by a melting ice-cap.

“Pretty good,” said my companion at last. “At Flambard you can walk steadily back into the past. Every chapter is written plain to be read.”

“At Goodeve, too,” I said.

“At Goodeve, too. You know the place? It is the first home I have had since I was a child, for I have been knocking about for years in lodgings and tents. I’m still a little afraid of it. It’s a place that wants to master you. I’m sometimes tempted

to give myself up to it and spend my days listening to its stories and feeling my way back through the corridors of time. But I know that that would be ruin."

"Why?"

"Because you cannot walk backward. It is too easy, and the road leads nowhere. A man must keep his eyes to the front and resist the pull of his ancestors. They're the devil, those ancestors, always trying to get you back into their own rut."

"I wish mine would pull harder," I said. "I've been badly overworked lately, and I feel at this moment like a waif, with nothing behind me and nothing before."

He regarded me curiously. "I thought you looked a little done up. Well, that's the penalty of being a swell. You'll lie fallow for a day or two and the power will return. There can't be much looking backward in your life."

"Nor looking forward. I seem to live between high blank walls. I never get a prospect."

"Oh, but you are wrong," he said seriously. "All your time is spent in trying to guess what is going to happen—what view the Courts will take of a case, what kind of argument will hit the prospective mood of the House. It is the same in law and politics and business and everything practical. Success depends on seeing just a little more into the future than other people."

I remembered my odd feeling at dinner of the raft on the misty sea, and the anxious peering faces at the edge.

"Maybe," I said. "But just at the moment I'm inclined to envy the people who live happily

in the present. Our host, for example, and the boys and girls who are dancing." In the stillness the faint echo of music drifted to us from the house.

"I don't envy them a bit," he said. "They have no real sporting interest. Trying to see something solid in the mist is the whole fun of life, and most of its poetry."

"Anyhow, thank Heaven, we can't see very far. It would be awful to look down an avenue of time as clear as this strip of lawn, and see the future as unmistakable as Flambard."

"Perhaps. But sometimes I would give a good deal for just one moment of prevision."

After that, as we strolled back, we talked about commonplace things—the prospects of a not very secure Government, common friends, the ways of our hostess, whom he loved, and the abilities of Mayot, which—along with me—he doubted. As we entered the house again we found the far end of the hall brightly lit, since the lamps had been turned on in the porch. The butler was ushering in a guest who had just arrived, and Sally had hastened from the drawing-room to greet him.

The new-comer was one of the biggest men I have ever seen, and one of the leanest. A suit of grey flannel hung loose upon his gigantic bones. He reminded me of Nansen, except that he was dark instead of fair. His forehead rose to a peak, on which sat one solitary lock, for the rest of his head was bald. His eyes were large and almost colourless, mere pits of light beneath shaggy brows. He was bowing over Sally's hand in a foreign way, and the movement made him cough.

"May I present Sir Edward Leithen?" said Sally. "Sir Robert Goodeve . . . Professor Moe."

The big man gave me a big hand, which felt hot and damp. His eyes regarded me with a hungry interest. I had an impression of power—immense power, and also an immense fragility.

2

I did not have a good night ; I rarely do when I have been overworking. I started a chapter of *Barchester Towers*, dropped off in the middle, and woke in two hours restless and unrefreshed. Then I must have lain awake till the little chill before dawn which generally sends me to sleep. The window was wide open and all the minute sounds of a summer night floated through it, but they did not soothe me. I had one of those fits of dissatisfaction which often assail the sleepless. I felt that I was making very little of my life. I earned a large income, and had a considerable position in the public eye, but I was living, so to speak, from hand to mouth. I had long lost any ordinary ambitions, and had ceased to plan out my career ahead, as I used to do when I was a young man. There were many things in public life on which I was keen, but it was only an intellectual keenness ; I had no ardour in their pursuit. I felt as if my existence were utterly shapeless.

It was borne in on me that Goodeve was right. What were his words?—"Trying to see something solid in the mist is the whole fun of life and most of its poetry." Success, he had argued, depended upon looking a little farther into the future than other people. No doubt ; but then I didn't want

success—not in the ordinary way. He had still his spurs to win, whereas I had won mine, and I didn't like the fit of them. Yet all the same I wanted some plan and policy in my life, for I couldn't go on living in the mud of the present. My mind needed prospect and horizon. I had often made this reflection before in moments of disillusionment, but now it came upon me with the force of a revelation. I told myself that I was beginning to be cured of my weariness, for I was growing discontented, and discontent is a proof of vitality. . . . As I fell asleep I was thinking of Goodeve and realising how much I liked him. His company might prove the tonic I required.

I rose early and went for a walk along the Arm to look for a possible trout. The May-fly season was over, but there were one or two good fish rising beyond a clump of reeds where the stream entered the wood. Then I breakfasted alone with Evelyn, for Flambard is not an early house. His horses were mostly at grass, but he lent me a cob of Sally's. I changed into breeches, cut a few sandwiches, and set out for the high Downs. I fancied that a long lonely day on the hills would do me as much good as anything.

It was a quiet dim morning which promised a day of heat. I rode through a mile of woods full of nesting pheasants, then over a broomy common, and then by way of a steep lane on to the turf of the Downs. I found myself on the track where Evelyn exercised his race-horses, for he trained at home, so I gave my beast its head, and had the most delectable of experiences, a gallop over perfect turf. This brought me well up on the side

of Stobarrow, and by the time I reached its summit the haze was clearing and I was looking over the Arm and the young Thames to the blue lift of Cotswold.

I spent the whole day on the uplands. I ate my sandwiches in a clump of thorns, and had a mug of rough cider at an alehouse. I rode down long waterless combes, and ascended other tops besides Stobarrow. For an hour I lay on a patch of thyme, drowsy with the heat and the aromatic scents. I smoked a pipe with an old shepherd, and heard slow tales of sheep and dogs and storms and forgotten fox-hunts. In the end I drugged myself into a sort of animal peace. Thank God, I could still get back when I pleased to the ancient world of pastoral.

But when on my return I came over the brink of Stobarrow I realised that I had gained little. The pastoral world was not mine; my world was down below in the valley where men and women were fretting and puzzling. . . . I no longer thought of them as on a raft looking at misty seas, but rather as spectators on a ridge, trying to guess what lay beyond the next hill. Tavanger and Mayot and Goodeve—they were all at it. A futile game, maybe, but inevitable, since what lay beyond the hill was life and death to them. I must recapture the mood for this guessing game, for it was the mainspring of effort and therefore of happiness.

I got back about six, had a bath and changed into flannels. Sally gave me a cup of tea at a table in the hall which carried food for a multitude, but did not look as if it had been much

patronised. Evelyn and the Lamingtons had gone to see the Wallingdon training stables ; the young people had had tea in the tennis-court pavilion ; Mayot had motored to Cirencester to meet a friend, and Tavanger had gone to Goodeve to look at the pictures, in which subject he was a noted connoisseur ; Charles Ottery had disappeared after luncheon, and she had sent the Professor to bed till dinner.

Sally's face wore something between a smile and a frown.

" Reggie Daker is in bed, too. He was determined to try Sir Vidas over the jumps in the park, though Evelyn warned him that the horse was short of exercise and was sure to give trouble. The jumps haven't been mended for months, and the take-off at some of them is shocking. Well, Sir Vidas came down all right, and Reggie fell on his head and nearly cracked his skull. He was concussed, and unconscious for a quarter of an hour. Dr. Micklem sewed him up, and he is now in bed, covered with bandages, and not allowed to speak or be spoken to till to-morrow. It's hard luck on poor Reggie, but it will keep him for a little from making a fool of himself about Pamela Brune. He hasn't a chance there, you know, and he is such a tactless old donkey that he is spoiling the field for Charles Ottery."

But it was not Reggie's misfortunes that made my hostess frown. Presently I learned the reason.

" I'm very glad of the chance of a quiet talk with you," she said. " I want to speak to you about Professor Moe. You saw him when he arrived last night. What did you think of him ? "

"He seemed a formidable personage," I replied.
"He looked very ill."

"He is very ill. I had no notion how ill he was. He makes light of it, but there must be something mortally wrong with his lungs or his heart. He seems to be always in a fever, and now and then he simply gasps for breath. He says he has been like that for years, but I can't believe it. It's a tragedy, for he is one of the greatest minds in the world."

"I never heard of him before."

"You wouldn't. You're not a scientist. He's a most wonderful mathematician and physicist—rather in the Einstein way. He has upset every scientific law, but you can't understand just how unless you're a great scientist yourself. Our own people hush their voices when they mention him."

"How did you come across him?"

"I met him last year in Berlin. You know I've a *flair* for clever people, and they seem to like me, though I don't follow a word they say. I saw that he was to be in London to read a paper to some society, so I thought I'd ask him to Flambard to show him what English country life was like. Rather to my surprise he accepted—I think London tired him and he wanted a rest."

"You're worried about him? Are you afraid that he'll die on your hands?"

"No-o," she answered. "He's very ill, but I don't think he'll die just yet. What worries me is to know how to help him. You see, he took me into his confidence this morning. He accepted my invitation because he wanted the quiet of the country to finish a piece of work. A tremendous

piece of work—the work of his life. . . . He wants something more. He wants our help. It seems that some experiment is necessary before he can be quite sure of his ground.”

“What sort of experiment?”

“With human beings—the right kind of human beings. You mustn’t laugh at me, Ned, for I can’t explain what he told me, though I thought I understood when he was speaking. . . . It has something to do with a new theory of Time. He thinks that Time is not a straight line, but full of coils and kinks. He says that the Future is here with us now, if we only knew how to look for it. And he believes he has found a way of enabling one to know what is going to happen a long time ahead.”

I laughed. “Useful for Evelyn and George. They’ll be able to back all the Ascot winners.”

But Sally did not laugh.

“You must be serious. The Professor is a genius, and I believe every word he says. He wants help, he told me. Not people like Evelyn and George. He has very clear ideas about the kind of man he needs. He wants Mr. Mayot and Mr. Tavanger and perhaps Charles Ottery, though he’s not quite sure about Charles. Above all, he wants you and Bob Goodeve. He saw you last night and took a tremendous fancy to you both.”

I forbore to laugh only out of deference to Sally’s gravity. It seemed a reduction to the absurd of Goodeve’s talk the night before and my reflections on the Downs. I had decided that I must be more forward-looking, and here was a wild foreigner who believed that he had found the exact technique of the business.

"I don't like it," I said. "The man is probably mad."

"Oh no, he isn't. He is brilliantly sane. You have only to talk to him to realise that. Even when I couldn't follow him I could see that he was not talking nonsense. But the point is that he wants to put it all before you. He is certain that he can make a convert of you."

"But I don't know the first thing about science. I have often got up a technical subject for a case, and then washed it out of my mind. I've never been instructed in the first principles. I don't understand the language."

"That is just why Professor Moe wants you. He says he wants a fresh mind, and a mind trained like yours to weigh evidence. It wasn't your *beaux yeux*, Ned, that he fell for, but your reputation as a lawyer."

"I don't mind listening to what he has got to say. But look here, Sally, I don't like this experiment business. What does he propose?"

"Nothing in the least unpleasant. It only means one or two people preparing themselves for an experience, which he says he can give them, by getting into a particular frame of mind. . . . He's not sure if he can bring it off, you know. The experiment is to be the final proof of his discovery. He was emphatic that there was no danger and no unpleasantness, whether it was successful or not. . . . But he was very particular about the people he wanted. He was looking at us all this morning with the queerest appraising eyes. He wants you and Bob especially, and Mr. Mayot and Mr. Tavanger, and possibly Charles. Oh yes, and he

thinks he may want me. But nobody else. He was perfectly clear about that."

I must say that this rather impressed me. He had chosen exactly those whom I had selected at dinner the previous night as the care-full as opposed to the care-free. He wanted people whose physical vitality was low, and who were living on the edge of their nerves, and he had picked them unerringly out of Sally's house-party.

"All right," I said. "I'll have a talk to him after dinner. But I want you to be guided by me, and if I think the thing fishy to call it off. If the man is as clever as you say, he may scare somebody into imbecility."

Before I dressed I rang up Landor, and was lucky enough to find him still in London. Landor, besides being a patent-law barrister pretty near the top of his branch, is a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a devotee of those dim regions where physics, metaphysics and mathematics jostle each other. He has published and presented me with several works which I found totally incomprehensible.

When I asked him about Professor Moe he replied with a respectful gurgle. "You don't mean to say you've got him at Flambard? What astounding luck! I thought he had gone back to Stockholm. There are scores of people who would walk twenty miles barefoot to get a word with him."

Landor confirmed all that Sally had said about the Professor's standing. He had been given the Nobel Prize years ago, and was undoubtedly the greatest mathematician alive. But recently he had

soared into a world where it was not easy to keep abreast of him. Landor confessed that he had only got glimmerings of meaning from the paper he had read two days before to the Newton Club. "I can see the road he is travelling," he said, "but I can't quite grasp the stages." And he quoted Wordsworth's line about "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone."

"He's the real thing," I asked, "and not a charlatan?"

I could hear Landor's cackle at the other end of the line.

"You might as well ask a conscript to vouch for Napoleon's abilities as ask me to give a certificate of respectability to August Moe."

"You're sure he's quite sane?"

"Absolutely. He's only mad in so far as all genius is mad. He is reputed to be a very good fellow and very simple. Did you know that he once wrote a book on Hans Andersen? But he looked to me a pretty sick man. There's a lot of hereditary phthisis in his race."

Dinner that evening was a pleasanter meal for me. I had more of an appetite, there was a less leaden air about my companions in fatigue, the sunburnt boys and girls were in good form, and Reggie Daker's woebegone countenance was safe on its pillow. Charles Ottery, who sat next to Pamela Brune, seemed to be in a better humour, and Mrs. Lamington was really amusing about the Wallingdon stables and old Wallingdon's stable-talk. I had been moved farther down the table, and had a good view of Professor Moe, who sat next to our hostess. His was an extraordinary face—

the hollow cheeks and high cheek-bones, the pale eyes, the broad high brow, and the bald head rising to a peak like Sir Walter Scott's. The expression was very gentle, like a musing child, but now and then he seemed to kindle, and an odd gleam appeared in his colourless pits of eyes. For all his size he looked terribly flimsy. Something had fretted his body to a decay.

He came up to me as soon as we left the dining-room. He spoke excellent English, but his voice made me uneasy—it seemed to come with difficulty from a long way down in his big frame. There was a vague, sad kindliness about his manner, but there was a sense of purpose, too. He went straight to the point.

"Some time you are going to give me your attention, Sir Edward, and I in return will give you my confidence. Her ladyship has so informed me. She insists, that gracious one, that I must go to bed, for I am still weary. Shall our talk be to-morrow after breakfast? In the garden, please, if the sun still shines."

3

I find it almost impossible to give the gist of the conversation which filled the next forenoon. We sat in wicker chairs on the flags of the Dutch garden in a grilling sun, for heat seemed to be the one physical comfort for which the Professor craved. I shall always associate the glare of a June sky with a frantic effort on my part to grasp the ultimate imponderables of human thought.

The Professor was merciful to my weakness. He had a great writing-pad on his knee, and would

fain have illustrated his argument with diagrams, but he desisted when he found that they meant little to me and really impeded his exposition. Most scientists use a kind of shorthand—formulas and equations which have as exact a meaning for them as an ordinary noun has for the ordinary man. But there was no chance for this shorthand with me. He had to begin from the very beginning, taking nothing for granted. I realised his difficulty. It was as if I had had to argue an intricate case, not before a learned judge but before an intelligent ignoramus, to whom each technical legal term had to be laboriously explained.

There was another difficulty, which applied not to me only but to the most intelligent auditor in the world. Suppose you are trying to expound to a man who has been stone-deaf from birth the meaning of sound. You can show him the physical effects of it, the brain and sense reactions, but the *fact* of sound you cannot bring home to him by any diagram or calculation. It is something for him without sensory vividness, altogether outside his realised universe. It was the same with the Professor's exposition of strange new dimensions, the discovery of which depended on logical processes. I could not grasp them imaginatively, and, not having lived as he had done with the arguments, I could not comprehend them intellectually.

But here—very crudely and roughly—is the kind of thing he tried to tell me.

He began by observing that in the blind instinct of man there was something which the normal

intellect lacked—a prevision of future happenings, for which reason gave no warrant. We all of us had occasionally dim anticipations of coming events, lurking somewhere in our nerves. A man walking in the dark was aware subconsciously of a peril and subconsciously braced himself to meet it. He quoted the sentences from Bergson which I have put at the head of this chapter. His aim was to rationalise and systematise this anticipatory instinct.

Then he presented me with a theory of Time, for he had an orderly mind, and desired to put first things first. Here he pretty well bogged me at the start. He did not call Time a fourth dimension, but I gathered that it amounted to that, or rather that it involved many new dimensions. There seemed to be a number of worlds of presentation travelling in Time, and each was contained within a world one dimension larger. The self was composed of various observers, the normal one being confined to a small field of sensory phenomena, observed or remembered. But this field was included in a larger field, and, to the observer in the latter, future events were visible as well as past and present.

In sleep, he went on, where the attention was not absorbed, as it was in waking life, with the smaller field of phenomena, the larger field might come inside the pale of consciousness. People had often been correctly forewarned in dreams. We all now and then were amazed at the familiarity with which we regarded a novel experience, as if we recognised it as something which had happened before. The universe was extended in Time, and

the dreamer, with nothing to rivet his attention to the narrow waking field, ranged about, and might light on images which belonged to the future as well as to the past. The sleeper was constantly crossing the arbitrary frontier which our mortal limitations had erected.

At this point I began to see light. I was prepared to assent to the conclusion that in dreams we occasionally dip into the future, though I was unable to follow most of the Professor's proofs. But now came the real question. Was it possible to attain to this form of prevision otherwise than in sleep? Could the observer in the narrow world turn himself by any effort of will into the profounder observer in the world of ampler dimensions? Could the anticipating power of the dreamer be systematised and controlled, and be made available to man in his waking life?

It could, said the Professor. Such was the result of the researches to which he had dedicated the last ten years of his life. It was as a crowning proof that he wished an experiment at Flambard.

I think that he realised how little I had grasped of his exposition of the fundamentals of his theory. He undertook it, I fancy, out of his scrupulous honesty; he felt bound to put me in possession of the whole argument, whether I understood it or not. But, now that he had got down to something concrete which I could follow, his manner became feverishly earnest. He patted my knee with a large lean hand, and kept thrusting his gaunt face close to mine. His writing-pad fell into the lily-pond, but he did not notice it.

He needed several people for his experiment

—the more the better, for he wanted a variety of temperaments, and he said something, too, about the advantage of a communal psychical effort. . . . But they must be the right kind of people—people with highly developed nervous systems—not men too deeply sunk in matter. (I thought of Evelyn and the Lamingtons and old Folliot.) He deprecated exuberant physical health or abounding vitality, since such endowments meant that their possessors would be padlocked to the narrower sensory world. He ran over his selection again, dwelling on each, summing each up with what seemed to me astounding shrewdness, considering that he had met them for the first time two days before. He wanted the hungry and the forward-looking. Tavanger and Mayot. “They will never be content,” he said, “and their hunger is of the spirit, though maybe an earthy spirit. . . .” Myself. He turned his hollow eyes on me, but was too polite to particularise what my kind of hunger might be. . . . Charles Ottery. “He is unhappy, and that means that his hold on the present is loose. . . .” Sally Flambard. “That gracious lady lives always *sur la branche*—is it not so? She is like a bird, and has no heavy flesh to clog her. Assuredly she must be one.” Rather to my surprise he added Reggie Daker. Reggie’s recent concussion, for some reason which I did not follow, made him a suitable subject. . . . Above all, there was Goodeve. He repeated his name with satisfaction, but offered no comment.

I asked him what form his experiment would take.

“A little training. No more. A little *ascesis*,

partly of the body, but mainly of the mind. It must be disciplined to see what it shall see."

Then, speaking very slowly, and drawing words apparently from as deep a cavern as that from which he drew his breath, he explained his plan.

There must be a certain physical preparation. I am as unlearned in medical science as in philosophy, but I gathered that recently there had been some remarkable advances made in the study of the brain and its subsidiary organs. Very likely I am writing nonsense, for the Professor at this point forgot about tempering the wind to the shorn lamb, and poured forth a flood of technicalities. But I understood him to say that, just as the cortex of the brain was the seat of the intellectual activities, so the subcortical region above the spinal cord was the home of the instinctive faculties. He used a lot of jargon, which, not being an anatomist, I could not follow, but he was obliging enough to draw me a diagram in his pocket-book, the writing-pad being in the lily-pond.

In particular there was a thing which he called an "intercalated cell," and which had a very special importance in his scheme. Just as the faculty of sight, he said, had for its supreme function the creation of an extended world, a world of space-perception, so the instinct which had its seat in this cell specialised in time-perception. . . . I had been reading lately about telegnosis, and mentioned that word, but he shook his head impatiently. The faculty he spoke of had nothing to do with telegnosis. "You have not understood my exposition," he said. "But no matter. It is enough if you understand my purpose."

It was desirable to stimulate the functioning of this cell. That could only be done in a small degree. A certain diet was necessary, for he had discovered that the cell was temporarily atrophied by the wrong foods. Also there was a drug, which acted upon it directly.

At this I protested, but he was quick to reassure me. "On my honour," he cried, "it is the mildest drug. Its bodily effect is as innocuous as a glass of tonic water. But I have proved experimentally that it lulls the other faculties and very slightly stimulates this one of which I speak."

Then he revealed his main purpose.

"I am still groping at the edge of mysteries," he said. "My theory I am assured is true, but in practice I can only go a very little way. Some day, when I am ashes, men will look at the future as easily as to-day they look out of a window at a garden. At present I must be content to exemplify my doctrine by small trivial things. I cannot enable you to gaze on a segment of life at some future date, and watch human beings going about their business. The most I hope for is to show you some simple matter of sense-perception as it will be at that date. Therefore I need some object which I am assured will be still in existence, and which I am also assured will have changed from what it now is. Name to me such an object."

I suggested, rather foolishly, the position of the planets in the sky.

"That will not do, for now we can predict that position with perfect certainty."

"A young tree?"

"The visible evidence of change would be too minute. I cannot promise to open up the future very far ahead. A year—two years maybe—no more."

"A building which we all know and which is now going up?"

Again he shook his head. "You may be familiar with the type of the completed structure, and carry the picture of it in your memory. . . . There is only one familiar object, which continues and likewise changes. You cannot guess? Why, a journal. A daily or weekly paper."

He leaned towards me and laid a hand on each of my knees.

"To-day is the 6th of June. Four days from now, if you and the others consent, I will enable you to see for one instant of time—no longer—a newspaper of the 10th day of June next year."

He lay back in his chair and had a violent fit of coughing, while I digested this startling announcement. . . . He was right on one point—a newspaper was the only thing for his experiment; that at any rate I saw clearly. I own to having been tremendously impressed by his talk, but I was not quite convinced; the thing appeared to be clean out of nature and reason. You see, I had no such stimulus to belief as a scientist would have had who had followed his proofs. . . . Still, it seemed harmless. Probably it would end in nothing—the ritual prepared and the mystics left gaping at each other. . . . No. That could scarcely happen, I decided; the mystagogue was too impressive.

The Professor had recovered himself, and was watching me under drooped eyelids. All the eagerness had gone out of his face, but that face had the

brooding power and the ageless wisdom of the Sphinx. If he were allowed to make the experiment something must happen.

Lady Flambard had promised to abide by my decision. . . . There could be no risk, I told myself. A little carefulness in diet, which would do everybody good. The drug? I would have to watch that. The Professor seemed to read my thoughts, for he broke in :

"You are worrying about the drug? It is of small consequence. If you insist, it can be omitted."

I asked how he proposed to prepare the subjects of his experiment. Quite simply, he replied. A newspaper—*The Times*, for example—would be made to play a large part in their thoughts. . . . I observed that it already played a large part in the thoughts of educated Englishmen, and he smiled—the first time I had seen him smile. There was an air of satisfaction about him, as if he knew what my answer would be.

"I see no objection to what you propose," I said at last. "I warn you that I am still a bit of a sceptic. But I am willing, if you can persuade the others."

He smiled again. "With the others there will be no difficulty. Our gracious hostess is already an enthusiast. Before luncheon I will speak to Mr. Tavanger and Mr. Mayot—and to Mr. Ottery when he returns. I shall not speak to them as I have spoken to you."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because they are longing for such a revelation as I propose, whereas you care not at all. But I

would beg of you to say a word on my behalf to Sir Robert Goodeve. His co-operation I especially seek."

He raised with difficulty his huge frame from the wicker chair, blinking his eyes in the hot sun, and leaning on a sundial as if he were giddy. I offered my arm, which he took, and together we went under the striped awning, which shaded one part of the terrace, into the coolness of the great hall.

You know the kind of banality with which, out of shyness, one often winds up a difficult conversation. I was moved to observe, as I left him, that in four days I hoped to be introduced to a new world. He made no answer. "To enter, waking, into the world of sleep," I added fatuously.

Then he said a thing which rather solemnised me.

"Not only the world of sleep," he said. "It is the world to which we penetrate after death."

As I watched his great back slowly mounting the staircase, I had a sudden feeling that into the peace of Flambard something fateful and tremendous had broken.

4

I do not know what Professor Moe said to Tavanger and Mayot. I knew both men, but not intimately, for they were a little too much of the unabashed careerist for my taste, and I wondered how, in spite of his confidence, he was going to interest their most practical minds.

After luncheon I wanted to be alone, so I took my rod and went down to the Arm, beyond the stretch where it ran among water-meadows.

It was a still bright afternoon, with a slight haze to temper the glare of the sun. The place was delicious, full of the scents of mint and meadow-sweet, yellow flag-irises glowing by the water's edge, and the first dog-roses beginning to star the hedges. There was not much of a rise, but I caught a few trout under the size limit, and stalked and lost a big fellow in the mill pool. But I got no good of the summer peace, and my mind was very little on fishing, for the talk of the morning made a merry-go-round in my head.

I had moments of considering the whole business a farce, and wondering if I had not made a fool of myself in consenting to it. But I could not continue long in that mood. The Professor's ardent face would come before me like a reproachful schoolmaster's, and under those compelling eyes of his I was forced back into something which was acquiescence, if not conviction. There was a shadow of anxiety at the back of my mind. The man was an extraordinary force, with elemental powers of brain and will; was it wise to let such an influence loose on commonplace people who happened to be at the moment a little loose from their moorings? I was not afraid of myself, but what about the high-strung Sally, and the concussed Reggie, and Charles Ottery in the throes of an emotional crisis? I kept telling myself that there was no danger, that nothing could happen. . . . And then I discovered, to my amazement that, if that forecast proved true, I should be disappointed. I wanted something to happen. Nay, I believed at the bottom of my heart that something would happen.

In the smoking-room before dinner I found Charles Ottery and Reggie Daker—a rather pale and subdued Reggie, with a bandage round his head and a black eye. They were talking on the window seat, and when I entered they suddenly stopped. When they saw who it was, Charles called to me to join them.

"I hear you're in this business, Ned," he said. "I got the surprise of my life when the Professor told me that you had consented. It's a new line of country for a staid old bird like you."

"The man's a genius," I replied. "I see no harm in helping him in his experiment. Did you understand his argument?"

"I didn't try. He didn't argue much, but one could see that he had any quantity of scientific stuff behind him. He hopes to make us dream while we're awake, and I thought it such a sporting proposition that I couldn't refuse. It must all be kept deadly secret, of course. We have to get into the right atmosphere, and tune our minds to the proper pitch, and it would never do to rope in a born idiot like George Lamington. He'd guy it from the start."

"You were convinced by the Professor?" I asked.

"I won't say convinced. I was interested. It's an amusing game anyhow, and I want to be amused."

Charles spoke with a lightness which seemed to me to be assumed. He had obviously been far more impressed than he cared to admit. I could see that, since Pamela was giving him a difficult time, he longed for something to distract him,

something which was associated with that world of new emotions in which he was living.

The lady's other suitor made no concealment. Reggie was honestly excited. He was flattered, perhaps, by being made one of the circle, and may have attributed his choice to his new rôle as an authority on books. At last he was being taken seriously. Also his recent concussion may have predisposed him to some research into the mysteries of mind, for as he explained, he could not remember one blessed thing that happened between putting Sir Vidas at a fence which he cleared with a yard to spare, and finding himself in bed with clouts on his head. He was insistent on the need of confidence in the experiment. "What I mean to say is, we've got to help the old boy out. If we don't believe the thing will come off, then it won't—if you see what I mean."

He dropped his voice as Evelyn Flambard and his terriers came noisily into the room.

As I was going upstairs to dress, I found Good-eve's hand on my shoulder.

"I hear you're on in this piece," he whispered jovially, as if the whole thing was a good joke.

"And you?" I whispered back.

"Oh, I'm on. I rather like these psychical adventures. I'm a hopeless subject, you know, and calculated to break up any *séance*. I haven't got enough soul—too solidly tied to earth. But I never mind offering myself as a victim."

He laughed and passed into his bedroom, leaving me wondering how the Professor had so signally failed with the man who was his special choice. He had obtained Goodeve's consent, so

there was no need of pressure from me, but clearly he had not made any sort of convert of him.

At dinner we all tried to behave as if nothing special was afoot, and I think we succeeded. Geroge Lamington had never had so good an audience for his dreary tales. He was full of racing reminiscences, the point of which was the preternatural cunning with which he had outwitted sundry rivals who had tried to beguile him. I never knew anyone whose talk was so choked with adipose tissue, but he generally managed to wallow towards some kind of point, which he and Evelyn found dramatic. . . . During most of the meal I talked to his wife. She could be intelligent enough when she chose, and had a vigorous interest in foreign affairs, for she was an Ambassador's daughter. When I first knew her she had affected a foreign accent, and professed to be more at home in Paris and Vienna than in London. Now she was English of the English, and her former tastes appeared only in intermittent attempts to get George appointed to a Dominion Governorship, where he would most certainly have been a failure. For the present, however, the drums and trumpets did not sound for her. The recent addition to the Lamington fortunes had plunged her deep in the upholstery of life. She was full of plans for doing up their place in Suffolk, and, as I am as ignorant as a coal-heaver about bric-à-brac, I could only listen respectfully. She had the mannerism of the very rich, whose grievance is not against the price of things but the inadequacy of the supply.

The Professor's health appeared to have improved, or it may have been satisfaction with his

initial success, for he was almost loquacious. He seemed to have acute hearing, for he would catch fragments of conversation far down the table, and send his great voice booming towards the speaker in some innocent interrogation. As I have said, his English was excellent, but his knowledge of English life seemed to be on the level of a South Sea islander. He was very inquisitive, and asked questions about racing and horses which gave Evelyn a chance to display his humour. Among the younger people he was a great success. Pamela Brune, who sat next to him, lost in his company her slight air of petulance and discontent, and became once again the delightful child I had known. I was obliged to admit that the Flambard party had improved since yesterday, for certain of its members seemed to have shaken off their listlessness.

While youth was dancing or skylarking on the terrace, and the rest were set solidly to bridge, we met in the upper chamber in the Essex wing, which had been given me as a sitting-room. At first, while we waited for the Professor, we were a little self-conscious. Tavanger and Mayot, especially, looked rather like embarrassed elders at a children's party. But I noticed that no one—not even Reggie Daker—tried to be funny about the business.

The Professor's coming turned us into a most practical assembly. Without a word of further explanation he gave us our marching orders. He appeared to assume that we were all ready to surrender ourselves to his directions.

The paper chosen was *The Times*. For the next

three days we were to keep our minds glued to that news-sheet, and he was very explicit about the way in which we were to do it.

First of all, we were to have it as much as possible before our eyes, so that its physical form became as familiar to each of us as our razors and cigarette-cases. We started, of course, with a considerable degree of knowledge, for we were all accustomed to look at it every morning. I remember wondering why the Professor had fixed so short a time as three days for this intensive contemplation, till he went on to give his further orders.

This ocular familiarity was only the beginning. Each of us must concentrate on one particular part to which his special interest was pledged—Tavanger on the first City page, for example, Mayot on the leader page, myself on the Law Reports—any part we pleased. Of such pages we had to acquire the most intimate knowledge, so that by shutting our eyes we could reconstruct the make-up in every detail. The physical make-up, that is to say; there was no necessity for any memorising of contents.

Then came something more difficult. Each of us had to perform a number of exercises in concentration and anticipation. We knew the kind of things which were happening, and within limits the kind of topic which would be the staple of the next day's issue. Well, we had to try to forecast some of the contents of the next day's issue, which we had not seen. And not merely in a general sense. We had to empty our minds of everything but the one topic, and endeavour to make as full as possible a picture of part of the exact contents of *The Times*

next morning—to see it not as a concept but as a percept—the very words and lines and headings.

For example. Suppose that I took the Law Reports pages. There were some cases the decisions on which were being given by the House of Lords to-day, and would be published to-morrow. I could guess the members of the tribunal who would deliver judgment, and could make a fair shot at what that judgment would be. Well, I was to try so to forecast these coming pages that I could picture the column of type, and, knowing the judges' idiosyncrasies, see before my eyes the very sentences in which their wisdom would be enshrined. . . . Tavanger, let us say, took the first City page. To-morrow he knew there would be a report of a company meeting in which he was interested. He must try to get a picture of the paragraph in which the City Editor commented on the meeting. . . . If Mayot chose the leader page, he must try to guess correctly what would be the subject of the first or second leader, and, from his knowledge of *The Times* policy and the style of its leader-writers, envisage some of the very sentences, and possibly the headings.

It seemed to me an incredibly difficult game, and I did not believe that, for myself, I would get any results at all. I have never been much good at guessing. But I could see the general lay-out. Everything would depend upon the adequacy of the knowledge we started with. To make an ocular picture which would have any exactitude, I must be familiar with the Lord Chancellor's mannerisms, Tavanger with the mentality and the style of the City editor, and Mayot with the policy of the

paper and the verbal felicities of its leader-writers. . . . Some of us found the prescription difficult and Reggie Daker groaned audibly.

But there was more to follow. We were also to try to fling our minds farther forward—not for a day, but for a year. Each morning at seven—I do not know why he fixed that hour—we were to engage in a more difficult kind of concentration—by using such special knowledge as we possessed to help us to forecast the kind of development in the world which June of next year would show. And always we had to aim at seeing our forecasts not in vague concepts, but in concrete black and white in the appropriate corner of *The Times*.

I am bound to say that, when I heard this, I felt that we had been let in for a most futile quest. We had our days mapped out in a minute programme—certain hours for each kind of concentration. We would meet the Professor in my sitting-room at stated times. . . . I think that he felt the atmosphere sceptical, for on this last point his manner lost its briskness and he became very solemn.

"It is difficult," he said, "but you must have faith. And I myself will help you. Time—all time—is with us *now*, but we are confined to narrow fields of presentation. With my help you will enlarge these fields. If you will give me honestly all your powers I can supplement them."

Lastly he spoke of the necessary regime. Too much exercise was forbidden, for it was desirable that our health should be rather an absence of ailments than a positive, aggressive well-being. There were to be no cold baths. We might smoke,

but alcohol was strictly forbidden—not much of a hardship, for we were an abstemious lot. As to diet, we had to behave like convalescents—no meat, not even fish—nothing which, in the Professor's words, "possessed automobility." We were allowed weak tea, but not coffee. Milk, cheese, fruit, eggs and cereals were to be our staples.

It all reminded me rather eerily of the ritual food which used to be given to human beings set apart for sacrifice to the gods.

"Our gracious hostess has so arranged it that the others will not be curious," said the Professor, and Sally nodded a mystified head.

I went to bed feeling that I should probably get a liver attack from lack of exercise, if I did not starve from lack of food. Next morning I found a *Times* on the tray which brought my morning tea. Sally must have sent ten miles to a main-line station to get it.

5

It is difficult to write the consecutive story of the next three days. I kept a diary, but, on consulting it, I find only a bare record of my hours of meditation on that confounded newspaper, and of our conferences with the Professor. I began in a mood which was less one of scepticism than of despair. I simply did not believe that I could get one step forward in this preposterous business. But I was determined to play the game to the best of my capacity, for Moe's talk last night had brought me fairly under his spell.

I did as I had been told. I emptied my mind

of every purpose except the one. I read the arguments in the case—it was an appeal by an insurance company—and then sat down to forecast what the report of the judgment would be, as given by *The Times* next day. Of the substance of the judgment I had not much doubt, and I was pretty certain that it would be delivered by the Lord Chancellor, with the rest of the Court concurring. I knew Boland's style, having listened often enough to his pronouncements, and it would have been easy enough to forecast the kind of thing he would say, using some of his pet phrases. But my job was to forecast what *The Times* reporters would make him say—a very different matter. I collected a set of old copies of the paper and tried to get into their spirit. Then I made a number of jottings, but I found myself slipping into the manner of the official *Law Reports*, which was not what I wanted. I remember looking at my notes with disfavour, and reflecting that this guessing game was nothing but a deduction from existing knowledge. If I had made a close study of *The Times* reports, I should probably get a good deal right, but since I had only a superficial knowledge I would get little. Moe's grandiose theories about Time had nothing to do with it. It was not a question of casting the mind forward into a new field of presentation, but simply of a good memory from which one made the right deductions.

After my first attempt I went for a walk, and tried to fix my mind on something different. I had been making a new rock-garden at Borrowby, and I examined minutely Sally's collection of Tibetan alpins. On my return the butler handed

me a note. The Professor had decided to have conferences with each of us separately, and my hour was three in the afternoon.

Before that hour I had two other bouts of contemplation. I wrestled honourably with the incurably evasive, and filled several sheets of foolscap with notes. Then I revised them, striking out phrases which were natural enough to Boland but unsuitable for a newspaper summary. The business seemed more ridiculous than ever. I was simply chewing the cud of memories—very vague, inexact memories.

The Professor received me in Sally's boudoir. Now, the odd thing was that in his presence I had no self-consciousness. If anyone had told me that I should have been unburdening my mind in a ridiculous game to a queer foreigner, with the freedom of a novice in the confessional, I should have declared it impossible. But there it was. He sat before me with his gaunt face and bottomless pits of eyes, very grave and gentle, and without being asked I told him what I had been doing.

"That is a beginning," he said, "only a beginning. But your mind is too active as yet to *perceive*. You are still in the bonds of ratiocination. Your past knowledge is only the jumping-off stage from which your mind must leap. Suffer yourself to be more quiescent, my friend. Do not torture your memory. It is a deep well from which the reason can only draw little buckets of water."

I told him that I had been making notes, and he approved. "But do not shape them as you would shape a logical argument. Let them be raw material out of which a picture builds itself.

Your business is perception, not conception, and perception comes in flashes." And then he quoted what Napoleon had once said, how after long pondering he had his vision of a battle plan in a blinding flash of white light.

He said a great deal more which I do not remember very clearly. But one thing I have firm in my recollection—the compelling personality of the man. There must have been some strange hypnotic force about him, for as he spoke I experienced suddenly a new confidence and an odd excitement. He seemed to wake unexpected powers in me, and I felt my mind to be less a machine clamped to a solid concrete base, than an aeroplane which might rise and soar into space. Another queer thing—I felt slightly giddy as I left him. Unquestionably he was going to make good his promise and supplement our efforts, for an influence radiated from him, more masterful than any I have ever known in a fellow-mortal. It was only after we had parted that the reaction came and I felt a faint sense of antagonism, almost of fear.

In my last effort before dinner I struggled to follow his advice. I tried to picture next day's *Times*. The judgment from its importance would occupy a column at least; I saw that column and its heading, and it seemed to me to be split up into three paragraphs. I saw some of the phrases out of my notes, and one or two new ones. There was one especially, quite in Boland's manner, which seemed to be repeated more than once—something like this: "It is a legal commonplace that a contract of insurance is one *uberrimae fidei*, which is vitiated by any non-disclosure, however

innocent, of material facts." I scribbled this down, and found, when I re-read it, that I had written *uberrimi*, and deplored my declining scholarship.

At dinner our group were as glum as owls. I did not know how the Professor had handled the others, but I assumed that his methods had been the same as with me, and certainly he had produced an effect. We all seemed to have something on our minds, and came in for a good deal of chaff, the more as we refrained from so many dishes. Reggie Daker escaped, for he was a convalescent, but Evelyn had a good deal to say about Goodeve's abstinence. Goodeve was supposed to be entering for a tennis contest which the young people had got up, while George Lamington started the legend that I was reducing my weight for the next Bar point-to-point. Happily this interest in our diet diverted their attention from our manners, which must have been strange. All seven of us were stricken with aphasia, and for myself I felt that I was looking on at a movie-show.

The Professor gathered us together in my sitting-room a little before midnight. As I looked at the others I had an impression of a kindergarten. Compared with him we all seemed ridiculously young, crude and ignorant. Mayot's alert intelligence was only the callow vivacity of a child; Tavanger's heavy face was merely lumpish; even Goodeve looked the bright schoolboy. As for Sally and Reggie and Charles Ottery, something had happened to them which drained the personality from their faces, and made them seem slight and wispy. Moe himself brooded over us like a

vital Buddha. I had an uneasy sense of looking at a man who lived most of his time in another world than ours.

He did not instruct us ; he talked, and his talk was like a fierce cordial. Looking back at what I can remember of it, it does not seem to make any kind of sense, but it had an overwhelming effect on his hearers. It was as if he were drawing aside curtain after curtain, and, though we could not see into the land beyond the curtains, we were convinced of its existence. As I have said, I could not make sense of my recollection of it, but while I was listening it seemed to be quite simple and intelligible. . . .

He spoke of the instinct which gave perceptions, and of its immense power as compared to our petty reason which turned percepts into concepts. He spoke of what he called the "eye of the mind," and said the very phrase pointed to some intuition in the ordinary being of a gift which civilisation had atrophied. . . . Then Reggie Daker became important. The Professor elicited from the coy Reggie that in his childhood he had been in the habit of seeing abstract things in a concrete form. For Reggie the different days of the week had each a special shape, and each of the Ten Commandments a special colour. Monday was a square and Saturday an oval, and Sunday a circle with a segment bitten out ; the Third Commandment was dark blue, and the Tenth a pale green with spots. Reggie had thought of Sin as a substance like black salt, and the Soul as something in the shape of a kidney bean. . . .

It all sounds the wildest nonsense, but the

Professor made out of Reggie's confidences a wonderful thing. His images might seem ridiculous, but they showed perception struggling to regain its rightful place. He had some theory of the relation between the concrete vision and the abstract thought, which he linked somehow or other to his doctrine of Time. In the retrospect I cannot remember his argument, but he convinced me absolutely. . . . He had a lot to say about the old astrologers and magic-makers who worked with physical charms and geometrical figures, and he was clear that they had had a knowledge of mysteries on which the door had long been locked. Also he talked about certain savage beliefs in ancient Greece and in modern Africa—which he said were profundity and not foolishness. . . . He spoke, too, about the world of dreams, and how its fantasy had often a deeper reality than waking life. "We are children on the seashore," he said, "watching the jetsam of the waves, and every fragment of jetsam is a clue to a land beyond the waters which is our true home."

Not for a moment did any of us think him mad. We sat like beggars, hungrily picking up crumbs from a feast. Of one thing I was presently convinced. Moe had cast a stronger spell over the others than over myself. I found my mind trying feebly to question some of his sayings, to link them with the ordinary world of thought; but it was plain that the rest accepted everything as inspired and infallible gospel.

I dare say I was tired, for I slept more soundly than I had done for weeks. I was called at seven, and set myself, according to instructions, to a

long-range forecast—what would be likely to happen on June 10th a year ahead. It sounds a futile job, and so I found it. My head soon grew dizzy with speculations, some of them quite outside the legal sphere which I had marked out as my own. But I found one curious thing. I had lost the hopelessness which had accompanied my contemplations of the previous day. I *believed* now that I could make something of the task. Also I found my imagination far more lively. I convinced myself that in a year's time there would be a new Lord Chancellor and a new Lord of Appeal. I beheld them sitting in the Lords, but the figure on the Woolsack was so blurred that I could not recognise it. But I saw the new Lord clearly, and his face was the face of young Molsom, who had only taken silk two years ago. Molsom's appointment was incredible, but, as often as the picture of the scarlet benches of the Upper House came before me, there was Molsom, with his dapper little figure and his big nose and his arms folded after his habit. I realised that I was beginning to use the "mind's eye," to see things, and not merely to think them.

The Times was brought to my bedside at eight, and I opened it eagerly. There was the judgment in my case, delivered, as I had expected, by Boland. It ran not to a whole column, but to less than three-quarters; but I had been right on one point—it was broken up into three paragraphs. The substance of the judgment was much as I had foreseen, but I had not been lucky in guessing the wording, and Boland had referred to only two of the cases I had marked down for him. . . .

But there was one amazing thing. He had used the sentence about *uberrimae fidei*—very much in the form I had anticipated. More—far more. *The Times* had that rare thing, a misprint: it had *uberrimi*, the very blunder I had made myself in my anticipatory jottings.

This made me feel solemn. My other correct anticipations might be set down to deductions from past knowledge. But here was an indubitable instance of anticipatory perception.

From that hour I date my complete conversion. I was as docile now as Sally, and I stopped trying to reason. For I understood that, behind all the regime and the exercises, there was the tremendous fact of Professor Moe himself. If we were to look into the future it must be largely through his eyes. By the sheer power of intellect he had won a gift, and by some superabundant force of personality he was able to communicate in part that gift to others.

I am not going to attempt to write in detail the story of the next two days, because external detail matters little; the true history was being made in the heads of the seven of us. I went obediently through the prescribed ritual. I pored over *The Times* as if my salvation depended upon it. I laboured to foresee the next day's issue, and I let my mind race into the next year. I felt my imagination becoming more fecund and more vivid, and my confidence growing hourly. And always I felt behind me some mighty impetus driving me on and holding me up. I was in the charge of a Moses, like the puzzled Israelites stumbling in the desert.

I spent the intervals with a rod beside the Arm, and there I first became conscious of certain physical symptoms. An almost morbid nervous alertness was accompanied by a good deal of bodily lassitude. This could not be due merely to the diet and lack of exercise, for I had often been sedentary for a week on end and lived chiefly on bread and cheese. Rather it seemed that I was using my nervous energy so lavishly in one direction that I had little left for the ordinary purposes of life. . . . Another thing. My sight is very good, especially for long distances, and in dry-fly fishing I never need to use a glass to spot a fish. Well, in the little fishing I did that day, I found my eyes as good as ever, but I noted one remarkable defect. I saw the trout perfectly clearly, but I could not put a fly neatly over him. There was nothing wrong with my casting; the trouble was in my eye, which had somehow lost its liaison with the rest of my body. The fly fell on the water as lightly as thistledown, but it was many inches away from the fish's nose.

That day the Professor made us fix our minds principally on the lay-out of June 10th next year. He wanted to have that date orientated for us with relation to other recurrent events—the Derby, Ascot, the third reading of the Budget, the conference of Empire Journalists and so forth. Also he provided us with sheets of blank paper, the size of *The Times*, which were to be, so to speak, the screen on which the magic lantern of our prevision cast its picture. He was very careful, almost fussy, about this business. The sheets had nothing printed on them, but they had to be exactly right

in size, and he rejected the first lot that Sally provided.

But I cannot say that I paid much attention to these or any other details. I was in a mood of utter obedience, simply doing what I was told to do to the best of my power. I was in the grip of a power which I had no desire to question, and which by some strong magic was breaking down walls for me and giving me a new and marvellous freedom. For there was no doubt about it—I could now set my mind at will racing into the future, and placing before me panoramas which might or might not be true, but which had all the concrete sharpness of reality. There were moments when I seemed almost to feel one sphere of presentation give place to another, as the driver of a car changes gear.

Dinner that night—Sally had sent the Professor to bed after tea—was as lively as the meal of the previous evening had been dull—lively, that is, for the rest of the party, not for us seven. For we seven suddenly developed a remarkable capacity for making sport for the populace, by a kind of mental light-headedness, similar to my clumsiness with the trout. Our minds seemed to have jolted out of focus. There is a species of *bêtise*, which I believe at Cambridge is named after some don, and which consists in missing completely the point of a metaphor or a joke, in setting the heavy heel of literalness on some trivial flower of fancy. It is a fault to which the Scots are supposed to be prone, and it is the staple of most of the tales against that nation. The classic instance is Charles Lamb's story of how he was once present at a

dinner given in honour of Burns, at which a nephew of the poet was to be present. As the company waited on the arrival of the guest, Lamb remarked that he wished the uncle were coming instead of the nephew : upon which several solemn Scotsmen arose to inform him that that was impossible, because Burns was dead.

That night we seven became unconscious Caledonians. Reggie Daker began it, by asking a ridiculous question about a story of Evelyn's. At first Evelyn looked wrathful, suspecting irony, and then, realising Reggie's guilelessness, he turned the laugh against that innocent. The extraordinary thing was that we all did it. Sally was the worst, and Charles Ottery a good second. Even Mayot fell into the trick—Mayot, who had a reputation for a quick and caustic wit. George Lamington was talking politics. "A Bengali Cabinet in England," George began, and was interrupted by Mayot with, "But, hang it, man, there's no Bengali Cabinet in England!" The fact that I noted our behaviour would seem to prove that I was not so deeply under the spell as the others.

We made sport, as I have said, for the company, and some of them enjoyed the pleasant sense of superiority which comes when people who have a reputation for brains make fools of themselves. Yet the mirth struck me as a little uneasy. There was a sense somewhere that all was not well, that odd things were going on beneath the surface. Pamela Brune, I remember, let her eyes rest on Charles Ottery as she left the room, and in those eyes I read bewilderment, almost pain.

Next morning we began the drug. There were in all three doses—the first with morning tea, the second at three in the afternoon, and the third after dinner. For myself I felt no particular effects, but I can testify that that day, the last day of our preparation, my mood changed.

For the first time I found some dregs of fear in my mind. My confidence in Moe was in no way abated, but I began to feel that we were moving on the edge of things, not mysterious only but terrible. My first cause for uneasiness was the Professor himself. When I met him that morning I was staggered by his looks. His colour was like white wax, and the gauntness of his face was such that it seemed that not only flesh had gone but muscle and blood, so that there remained only dead skin stretched tight over dead bone. His eyes were alive and no longer placid pools, but it was a sick life, and coughing shook him as an autumn wind shakes the rafters of a ruined barn. He professed to be well enough, but I realised that his experiment was draining his scanty strength. The virtue was going out of him into us, and I wondered if before the appointed time the dynamo might not fail us.

My other anxiety was Goodeve. He had begun by being the most sceptical of the lot of us, but I noticed that at each conference with Moe he grew more silent, his face more strained, and his eyes more unquiet. There was now something positively furtive in them, as if he were in dread of some menace springing out at him from ambush. He hung upon the Professor's words with dog-like devotion, very odd in a personality so substantial

and well defined. By tacit consent none of us ever spoke of the experiment, as if we felt that any communication among ourselves might weaken the strong effluence from our leader's mind, so I could not put out any feelers. But the sight of Goodeve at luncheon increased my lurking fear that we were getting very near the edge of some indefinable danger.

I felt very drowsy all day, and dozed in a garden chair between the exercises. I usually dream a good deal of nights, but now I slept like a log—which may have been due to nervous fatigue, or more likely to the switching of the dream-world over into the waking hours. The strangest thing about the whole experience was that I never felt one moment of boredom. I was doing something infinitely monotonous, and yet my powers bent themselves to it as readily as if every moment were a new excitement. That, too, rather frightened me. If this stimulus was so potent for a flat nature like mine, what must be its power over more mercurial souls?

I must record what happened at tea. Nearly all the guests were there, and a cheerful party of young people had come over from a neighbouring house. Now Sally had a much-loved terrier, a Dandie Dinmont called Andrew, who had been on a visit to the vet and had only returned that afternoon. Andrew appeared when tea was beginning, and was received by his mistress with every kind of endearment. But Andrew would not go near her; he fled, knocking over a table, and took refuge between Evelyn's legs, and nothing would draw him from his sanctuary. He

used to be a friend of mine, but he met my advances with a snap and the most dismal howling. There he stood, pressed against Evelyn's shins, his teeth bared, his big head lowered and bristling. He seemed to have no objection to the others, only to Sally and me. Then Mayot came in with Tavanger, and again Andrew wailed to the skies. Charles Ottery and Reggie received the same greeting; Goodeve, too, who sat down next to Evelyn and thereby drove Andrew yelping to a corner. After that he recovered a little and accepted a bit of bread and butter from Pamela Brune, by whose side he had ensconced himself. I was deeply interested in the whole performance, for it was not humanity that Andrew disliked, but that section of it which was engaged in the experiment. I was pondering on this marvel, when there came a howl like nothing on earth, and I saw Andrew streaking out of the drawing-room, slithering over rugs and barging into stools, with Evelyn after him. I also saw that Moe had just entered by another door, looking like a death-in-life.

The Professor sat himself by me, and drank his tea thirstily. The tiny cup seemed almost too great a weight for the mighty hand to raise. He turned to me with the ghost of a smile.

"That dog pays tribute to our success," he said. "The animal has instinct and the man reason, and on those terms they live together. Let a man attain instinct and the animal will flee from him. I have noted it before."

Some neighbours came to dinner, so we made a big party, and the silent conclave passed unnoticed, though Sally's partner must have

wondered what had become of her famous sparkle, for she was the palest and mutest of spectres. I felt myself an observer set at a distance not only from the ordinary members of the party but from our coterie—which proves that I must have been less under Moe's spell than my companions. For example, I could not only watch with complete detachment the behaviour of the cheerful young people, and listen to George Lamington's talk of his new Lancia, but I could observe from without Sally's absent-mindedness and stammered apologies, and Goodeve's look of unhappy expectation, and Charles Ottery's air of one struggling with something on the edge of memory, and Tavanger's dry lips—the man drank pints of water. One thing I noticed. They clearly hated those outside our group. Sally would shrug her shoulders as if unbearably tried, and Mayot looked murderously now and then at Evelyn, and Charles Ottery, who sat next to Pamela Brune, regarded her with hard eyes. I was conscious of something of the same sort myself, for most of my fellows had come to look to me like chattering manikins. They bored me, but I did not feel for them the overwhelming distaste which was only too apparent in the other members of the group. Their attitude was the opposite of Miranda's cry—

“ O brave world
That has such people in't.”

I doubt if they thought the world brave, and for certain they had no illusion about its inhabitants.

It was a very hot night, and I went out beyond the terrace to sniff the fragrance of Sally's rock

garden. As I sat dangling my legs over the parapet I felt a hand on my arm, and turned to find Pamela Brune.

"Come for a walk, Uncle Ned," she said. "I want to talk to you."

She slipped her arm through mine, and we went down the long alley between yews at the end of the Dutch garden. I felt her arm tremble, and when she spoke it was in a voice which she strove to make composed.

"What has happened to you all?" she asked. "I thought this Whitsuntide was going to be such fun, and it began well—and now everybody is behaving so oddly. Sally hasn't smiled for two days, and Reggie is more half-witted than ever, and you look most of the time as if you were dropping off to sleep."

"I am pretty tired," I replied.

"Oh yes, I know," she said impatiently. "There are excuses for you—and for Sally perhaps, for she has been overdoing it badly. . . . But there is a perfect epidemic of bad manners abroad. To-night at dinner I could have boxed Charles Ottery's ears. He was horribly rude."

"You haven't been very kind to him," I said lamely.

She withdrew her hand.

"What do you mean? I have always been civil . . . and he has been very very unkind to me . . . I hate him. I'll never speak to him again."

Pamela fled from me down the shadowed alley like a nymph surprised by Pan, and I knew that she fled that I might not see her tears.

Later that night we had our last conference with Moe, for next morning at seven in my sitting-room we were to meet for the final adventure. It was a short conference, and all he seemed to do was to tighten the cords with which he had bound us. I felt his influence more sharply than ever, but I was not in such perfect thralldom as the others, for with a little fragment of my mind I could still observe and think objectively. . . .

I observed the death-mask of the Professor. That is the only word by which to describe his face. Every drop of blood seemed to have fled from it, and in his deep pits of eyes there was no glimmer of life. It was a mask of death, but it was also a mask of peace. In that I think lay its compelling power. There was no shadow of unrest or strife or doubt in it. It had been purged of human weakness as it had been drained of blood. I remembered "grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone."

I thought—what did I think? I kept trying as a desperate duty to make my mind function a little on its own account. I cast it back over the doings of the past days, but I could not find a focus. . . . I was aware that somehow I had acquired new and strange gifts. I had become an adept at prospecting the immediate future, for, though I made many blunders, I had had an amazing percentage of successes. But the Professor did not set much store apparently by this particular *expertise*, and my main task had been long-range forecasts a year ahead. These, of course, could not be verified, but I had managed to create a segment of a future world as shot with colour and as diversified with incident as the world of sense around me. . . .

About that there were some puzzles which I could not solve. In guessing the contents of the next day's *Times* I had a mass of concrete experience to build on, but I had not that experience to help me in constructing what might happen across the space of a year, with all a year's unaccountable chances. . . . Then I reflected that the power of short range forecasts had come in only a small degree from the exercise of my reason upon past experience. That was but a dim light: it was the dæmonic power of the Professor's mind which had given me these illuminations. Could the strong wings of that spirit carry seven humdrum folk over the barriers of sense and habit into a new far world of presentation?

That was my last thought before I fell asleep, and I remember that I felt a sudden horror. We were feeding like parasites upon something on which lay the shadow of dissolution.

6

I was up and dressed long before seven. The drug or the diet or the exercises or all combined made me sleepy during the day, but singularly alert at first waking. Alert in body, that is—the feeling that I could run a mile in record time, the desire for something to task my bodily strength. But my brain these last mornings had not been alert. It had seemed a passive stage over which a pageant moved, a pageant of which I had not the direction. . . . But this morning the pageant had stopped, the stage was empty, or rather it was brooded over by a vast vague disquiet.

It was a perfect midsummer morning, with that

faint haze in the distance which means a hot noon. The park under my window lay drenched and silvered with dew. The hawthorns seemed to be bowed over the grasses under their weight of blossom. The birds were chattering in the ivy, and two larks were singing. Just under me, beyond the ha-ha, a foal was standing on tottering legs beside its mother, lifting its delicate nozzle to sniff the air. The Arm, where the sun caught it, was a silver crescent, and there was a little slow drift of amethyst smoke from the head keeper's cottage in a clump of firs. The scene was embodied, deep, primordial peace, and though, as I have said, my ordinary perception had become a little dulled, the glory of the June morning smote me like a blow.

It wakened a thousand memories, and memories of late had been rare things with me. . . . I thought of other such dawns, when I had tiptoed through wet meadows to be at the morning rise—water-lilies and buckbean and arrowhead and the big trout feeding ; dawn in the Alps, when, perched on some rock pinnacle below the last ridge of my peak, I had eaten breakfast and watched the world heave itself out of dusk into burning colour ; a hundred hours when I had thanked God that I was alive. . . . A sudden longing woke in me, as if these things were slipping away. These joys were all inside the curtain of sense and present perception, and now I was feeling for the gap in the curtain, and losing them. What mattered the world beyond the gap ? Why should we reach after that which God had hidden ? . . .

Fear, distaste, regret chased each other through my mind. Something had weakened this morning.

Had the *mystica catena* snapped? . . . And then I heard a movement in my sitting-room, and turned away from the window. My mind might be in revolt, but my will was docile.

We sat in a semicircle round the Professor. It was a small room with linen-fold panelling, a carved chimney-piece, and one picture—a French hunting scene. The morning sun was looking into it, so the blinds were half-lowered. We sat in a twilight, except in one corner, where the floor showed a broad shaft of light. I was next to Sally at the left-hand edge of the circle. That is all I remember about the scene, except that each of us had a copy of *The Times*—not the blank paper we had had before, but that morning's *Times*, the issue for the 10th of June in that year of grace.

I must have slipped partly out of the spell, for I could use my eyes and get some message from them. I dare say I could have understood one of *The Times* leaders. But I realised that the others were different. They could not have made sense of one word. To them it was blank white paper, an empty slate on which something was about to be written. They had the air of dull but obedient pupils with their eyes chained to their master.

The Professor wore a dressing-gown, and sat in the writing-table chair—deathly white, but stirred into intense life. He sat upright, with his hands on his knees, and his eyes, even in the gloom, seemed to be probing and kneading our souls. . . . I felt the spell, and consciously struggled against it. His voice helped my resistance. It was weak and cracked, without the fierce vitality of his face.

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Fear, distaste, regret chased each other through my mind. Something had weakened this morning.

In that fateful moment, while the soul of a genius was quitting the body, five men, staring at what had become the simulacrum of a *Times* not to be printed for twelve months, read certain things.

Mayot had a vision of the leader page, and read two sentences of comment on a speech by the Prime Minister. In one sentence the Prime Minister was named, and the name was not that of him who then held the office.

Tavanger, on the first City page, had a glimpse of a note on the formation of a great combine, by the Anatilla Corporation, of the michelite-producing interests of the world.

Reggie Daker, on the Court page, saw an account of the departure of an archæological expedition to Yucatan, and his name appeared as one of the members.

Goodeve and Charles Ottery—the one on the page opposite the leaders and the other on the first page of the paper—read the announcement of their own deaths.

XLVI: MR. ARNOLD TAVANGER

I

“ For mee (if there be such a thing as I)
 Fortune (if there be such a thing as shee)
 Spies that I beare so well her tyranny,
 That she thinks nothing else so fit for mee.”
 JOHN DONNE.

TAVANGER'S life was a little beyond my beat. Your busy city magnate does not dine out a great deal, and as a rule he fights shy of political circles. Before that Flambard Whitsuntide I had

met him occasionally at public dinners, and once I had had to cross-examine him in a case in the Commercial Court, and a very tough proposition I found him. I was attracted by something solid and dignified in his air, and I thought his taciturnity agreeable; your loquacious financier is the dullest of God's creatures. During the early autumn I found myself occasionally wondering whether Tavanger had seen anything under Moe's spell, for he had had the look of a convinced disciple. I was certain that he would play up to whatever vision he had been vouchsafed, for your financier is as superstitious as a punter and will act boldly on hints which he never attempts to rationalise. Then, in the beginning of the Michaelmas term, fortune brought us together.

I was invited to arbitrate in a case sent me by a firm of city solicitors who often briefed me. It concerned the ownership of a parcel of shares in a Rhodesian company. Tavanger had bought and paid for them, but there was some question about the title, and another party, representing a trust estate, had put forward a claim. It was a friendly affair, for the trustees only wished to protect themselves, and instead of making a case in court of it they had agreed, to save expense, to submit it to me as arbitrator—a growing practice in those days when there was little money to spend on litigation. The case, which turned on the interpretation of certain letters and involved a fairly obvious point of law, presented no great difficulty. I sat for four hours on a Saturday afternoon, and, after a most amicable presentation of both sides, I found for Tavanger.

This happened at the end of October, and interfered with a Saturday to Monday which I had meant to spend at Wirlesdon. It upset Tavanger's plans also, and, as we were leaving my chambers, he suggested that, since we were both left at a loose end, we should dine together. I agreed willingly, for I had taken a strong liking to Tavanger. He had given his evidence that afternoon with a downright reasonableness which impressed me, and I had enjoyed watching his strong, rather sullen face, enlivened by his bright humorous eyes. His father, I had been told, had come originally from Geneva, but the name had been anglicised to rhyme with "scavenger," and the man himself was as typical a Briton as you could picture. He had made a great reputation, and incidentally a great fortune, by buying wreckage and working it up into sound business. In whatever direction he moved he had a crowd of followers who trusted his judgment, but they trusted him blindly, for he was not communicative. He had done bold things, too, and more than once had defied City opinion and won. His name stood high for integrity as well as for acumen and courage, but he was not regarded as companionable. He was a bachelor, living alone in a big house in Kensington, and his hobbies were a hospital, which he ran brilliantly, and his collection of Dutch pictures. Nobody claimed to know him well, and I own to having been a little flattered when he showed a taste for my company. I had a notion that he might want to talk about Moe.

He didn't, for Flambard was never mentioned. But he had a good deal to tell me about the

Rhodesian company, the Daphne Concessions, which had been the subject of the arbitration. I had observed with some curiosity that he had taken special pains to acquire the 17,000 ordinary shares, and had paid a stiffish price for them, and I had wondered what purpose was at the back of his head. For when the papers had first come to me I had happened to meet the stockbroker who looked after my investments, and had asked him casually about the Daphne company. He had shaken his head over it. The shares were not quoted, he told me, and were presumably strongly held, but the mine had been going for five years without paying a dividend. Personally he did not believe in the future of michelite, but if I wanted a gamble there were plenty of shares of the chief producing company, the American Anatilla, to be had at round about 16s.

I am ashamed to say that I had only a very hazy idea what michelite was, and from Tavanger I sought information. I learned that it was a metal used chiefly in the manufacture of certain kinds of steel, and that it could also be applied to copper and iron. It gave immense hardness and impenetrability and complete freedom from corrosion, and could therefore be used like ferrochrome, for the construction of aeroplanes, projectiles and armour-plates; but the product was less costly than chrome steel and easier to work. Tavanger thought that its use must soon be greatly extended, especially in the automobile industry. The difficulty lay in smelting the ore, a process which required very special fluxes and was still an expensive one; nevertheless, in spite of the cost, many industries

would find it indispensable. It was found in large, but still undefined, quantities in a very few areas. In the Urals, of course, the home of all minerals, but there the deposits were little worked. In two places in the Balkans and one in Transylvania, where the owners were a German company, the Rosas-Sprenger, which had been the pioneer in the whole business. In Central America—Nicaragua, I think—under the Anatilla Corporation. These two companies, the Anatilla and the Rosas-Sprenger, virtually controlled the product now on the market.

"Prosperous?" he said in reply to my question. "No, not yet. They live in hope. The Anatilla has Glaubsteins behind it, and can afford to wait. The Rosas-Sprenger, I fancy, has a bit of a struggle, but they have Sprenger with them, who first discovered how to smelt the stuff—I'm told he is one of the greatest living metallurgical chemists. Sooner or later their chance is bound to come, unless the engineering trade goes bust altogether."

"How about our friends of the afternoon?" I asked.

"Oh, the Daphne is not yet a serious producer. It has always been a bit short of working capital. But we have assets the others don't possess. They have to mine their ore and have pretty high working costs, whereas we quarry ours—quarry it out of a range of hills which seems to be made of it. Also our stuff is found in a purer form, and the smelting is simpler—not easy or cheap, but easier and cheaper than theirs. When a boom comes we shall be in a favourable position. . . . Would you like some shares? I dare say it could be managed."

"No, thank you," I said. "I have no time to watch speculations, so I stick to gilt-edged. . . . You have a solid lump of the ordinary stock. Are you looking for more?"

He laughed. "For all I can get. I have taken a sudden fancy to michelite, and I usually back my fancies. The mischief is to know where to find the shares. Daphnes seem to be held by a legion of small folk up and down the world, none of whom want to sell. I have to stalk them like wild deer. You're not in this business and won't queer my pitch, so I don't mind telling you that I mean to have a controlling interest in Daphnes before I'm many months older."

After that we talked about Hobbema. As I walked back to my rooms I had two clear impressions in my mind. One was that I should not like to be up against Tavanger in any business on which his heart was set. There was that in the set of his jaw and the dancing light in his eyes which made him look immensely formidable. The second was that he knew something about the Daphne Concessions which others did not know, and knew it with absolute certainty. As I went to bed it suddenly occurred to me that he might have got this knowledge at Flambard, but as to its nature I could make no guess.

2

I did not meet Tavanger again till the week after Christmas. An unexpected piece of business had brought me up from Devonshire, and it lasted so long that I was forced to spend the night in town. It was that dead patch at the end of December

when London seems more deserted than in August, and, since I felt disinclined to face the howling desert of a club, I dined at the Savoy. There I found Tavanger marooned for the same cause. He had been shooting in Norfolk, and had been dragged up to an urgent conference.

He looked a different man from my last recollection of him—leaner in body, thinner in the face, deeply weathered, with the light patches round the eyes which you get from long blinking in a strong sun. I asked him what he had been doing with himself, and he laughed.

"Wait till I have ordered my dinner and I'll tell you. I'm short of good food and trying to make up for it. I want to get my teeth into decent beef again. . . . What about wine? It's cold enough for Burgundy."

When he had arranged a menu to his satisfaction he began an account of his recent doings. It lasted through the meal and long afterwards over a pipe in my rooms. Tavanger was a good narrator in his dry way, and instead of an evening of sleepy boredom I had excellent entertainment, for I heard a tale of activities which few middle-aged men would have ventured upon. . . .

Having got a list of the chief shareholders in Daphne Concessions, he set out to bargain for their holdings in the speediest way, by personal visitation. I gathered that time was of the essence of the business.

First of all he flew to Berlin. There he had an interview with the president of one of the big air services, and, having a good deal of purchase,

obtained certain privileges not usually granted to the travelling public. The said president gave a dinner for him at the Adlon, at which he met two people with whom he had long conversations. One was Dilling, the airman, one of the few German aces who had survived the War, who was now busy blazing the trails in commercial aviation. He was specialising at the moment in trans-African flights, and hoped to lower the record from Europe to Cape Town. Tavanger made friends with Dilling, who was a simple soul wholly engrossed in his profession.

The other guest was Sprenger, the metallurgical chemist who had first discovered the industrial uses of michelite. Sprenger was an untidy little man of about sixty, the kind of genius who has never reaped the fruit of his labours and is inclined to be peevish. But he went on doggedly with these labours under considerable difficulties, living on certain small fees for patent rights and on a modest salary paid him by the not very flourishing Rosas-Sprenger company. Tavanger had a remarkable gift of winning people's confidence, and he made Sprenger talk freely, since the latter had no notion that his companion had any michelite interests, though he showed an intelligent appreciation of the metal's possibilities. Three things Tavanger discovered. The first was that Sprenger was ill-informed about the Daphne Concessions, from which it might be deduced that his company was equally in the dark. Therefore no immediate competition for the Daphne shares need be looked for from that quarter. The second was that he was desperately loyal to his own company, and would

never be seduced into a rival concern. This solved one problem for Tavanger, who had been ready to pay a considerable price for Sprenger's services. The third was that the little chemist was toiling away at michelite problems, especially the major difficulty of the smelting costs, and was inclined to hope that he was on the brink of a great discovery. Any such discovery would of course belong to his company, but Tavanger ascertained that the Rosas-Sprenger had an agreement with the Anatilla to pool any devices for lessening costs. The Anatilla no doubt provided some of the working capital which enabled the German company to experiment.

The dinner convinced Tavanger that there was no time to be lost. He flew to Salonika by the ordinary Middle East service, and then changed into a seaplane which took him to Crete. The famous antiquary, Dr. Heilbron, was busy there with his Minoan excavations. Heilbron had some years before been engaged in investigating the Zimbabwe remains, and had spent a considerable time in Rhodesia. For some reason or other he had been induced to put money into Daphne Concessions at the start, and owned a block of 5,000 shares which he had almost forgotten about.

I could guess at the masterly way in which Tavanger handled Heilbron and got what he wanted. He appeared to be the ordinary traveller, who had dropped in on his way to Egypt to get a glimpse of the antiquary's marvellous work. Being well read, he no doubt talked intelligently on the Minoan civilisation. He let drop that he was a business man with South African interests, and

drew from Heilbron the story of his Daphne investment. The antiquary was comfortably off, but excavation consumes a good deal of money, and he seems to have jumped at Tavanger's offer to buy his shares, which he had long ago written off as worthless when he thought of them at all. Tavanger offered a good price for them, but insisted on Heilbron consulting his stockbroker. The answer was favourable, and the transfer was arranged by cable.

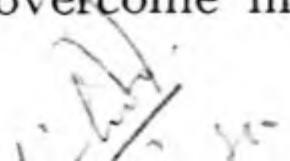
While in Crete Tavanger received another cable which perturbed him. The big block of Daphne shares which he had acquired was not all in his own name ; the registered holders of a third were his nominees and quite obscure people. This had been done with a purpose. He wanted to know if the Anatilla people were coming into the market ; if they did, they were not likely to approach him in the first instance, but to go for the humbler holders. The cable told him that an offer had been made to one of his nominees—a handsome offer—and that this had been traced by his intelligence department as coming through two firms who were known to handle a good deal of Glaubsteins' European business.

Tavanger had had a long experience of Glaubsteins' methods, and he was aware that they did not enter any market for fun. If they were buyers of Daphnes at all they were out for complete control, and, being people of his own stamp, would not let the grass grow under their feet. They had obviously started on the road which was to lead to a great combine. The bulk of the shareholders were in South Africa, and he was morally certain

that at this moment representatives of Glaubsteins were on steamers bound for the Cape. Well, it behoved him to get there before them, and that could not be done by returning to England and embarking in a South African boat. No more could it be done by the Messageries line and the East African route. A bolder course was required, and, faced with apparently insurmountable difficulties, Tavanger began to enjoy himself.

He cabled to the Aero president in Berlin and to Dilling, and then set his face for Egypt. Here he struck a snag. There was no direct air line from Crete to Cairo, and if he went back to Salonika the journey would take him six days. But he managed to pick up a coasting steamer from the Piræus, and by bribing the captain induced it to start at once. The weather grew vile, and the wretched boat took five days to wallow through the Eastern Mediterranean, while Tavanger, a bad sailor, lay deathly sick in a smelly cabin. He reached Cairo, pretty much of a physical wreck, only one day earlier than by the comfortable Salonika route.

But, as it happened, that one day made all the difference, for it enabled him to catch Dilling before he started on his southward journey. With Dilling he had all sorts of trouble, for the airman, in spite of the recommendation of the Aero president, showed himself most unwilling to take a passenger. He was flying a new type of light machine, and he wanted as his companion a skilled mechanic. I don't know how Tavanger managed to overcome his reluctance; he called



in some of his airmen friends at the Cairo station, and he got the British authorities to make an international favour of the thing, but I fancy the chief weapons were his uncommon persuasive power and his personal magnetism. Anyhow, after a hectic afternoon of argument, Dilling consented.

Then began a wild adventure. Tavanger had never flown much, only pottered between Croydon and the Continent, and now he found himself embarked on a flight across the wildest country on earth, with a pilot who was one-fourth scientist and three-fourths adventurer, and who did not value his own or anybody else's life at two pins. Tavanger admitted to me that at first his feet were cold. Also, Dilling on a big flight was a poor companion. His eagerness affected his temper, and his manners were those of a slave-driver and his conversation mostly insults.

As long as they were in the Nile Valley things went well enough. But in the basin of the Great Lakes they ran into a chain of thunderstorms, and after that into head-winds and massive sheets of rain. The bucketing they got played the deuce with the light machine, and engine trouble developed. They had to make a forced landing in very bad ground on the skirts of Ruwenzori, where they found that something had gone wrong with the petrol pump and that some of the propeller and cylinder bolts had worked loose. For forty hours they toiled in a tropical jungle cloaked in a hot wet mist, Dilling cursing steadily. Tavanger said that before they had got the machine right he had learned a good deal about air mechanics. When they started again they found that they

had two lizards and a snake in their fuselage!

After that they had many minor troubles, and Dilling's temper had become so vile, owing to his disappointment at the rate of speed, that Tavanger had much ado to keep the peace. He himself had contracted a chill, and for the last ten hours of the journey had a high temperature and a blinding headache. When they reached Bulawayo and he crawled out of his seat he could scarcely stand. Dilling, having made port, became a new man. He kissed Tavanger on both cheeks, and wept when he said good-bye.

Tavanger went to an hotel, sent for a doctor, and cured himself in two days. He could not afford to waste time in bed. Also he permitted himself to be interviewed by the local Press, for his journey with Dilling, in spite of the delays, had been something of a feat. He told the reporters that he had come to South Africa for a holiday, but that he hoped, while in the country, to have a look round. This of course meant business, for Tavanger's was a famous name in the circles of high finance. He mentioned no particular line, but hinted at the need for the establishment in South Africa of a certain type of steel-making plant to meet local requirements, with a possible export trade to India. He had considerable steel interests in Britain, and all this sounded quite natural. He knew that it would be cabled home, and would be read by the Anatilla people, and it seemed to him the best camouflage. If rumours got about that he was enquiring about Daphnes, they would be connected with this steel scheme and not taken too seriously.

He now controlled 22,000 odd of the 100,000 ordinary shares. There were five people in South Africa—about a dozen possibles, but five in particular—from whom he hoped to acquire the balance which would give him a controlling interest. The first was a retired railway engineer who lived at Wynberg, near Cape Town. The second was a lawyer who had a seat in the Union Parliament, and the third was a Johannesburg stockbroker. The other two were a mining engineer employed at a Rhodesian copper mine, and a fruit farmer in the Salisbury district. Tavanger decided that he had better begin at Cape Town, for that was the point which the Anatilla emissaries would reach first, and he must not be forestalled. The Anatilla people were of course in possession of all the information about the shareholders that he had himself.

So, reflecting that he was playing a game which seemed to belong to some crude romance of boyhood, Tavanger flew to Cape Town, and put up at the Mount Nelson. He had various friends in the city, but his first business was to study a passenger list of the incoming steamers. The tourist traffic to South Africa does not begin till after Christmas, so he found the lists small, and most of the people, with the help of the shipping clerks, he was able to identify. None of the passengers gave an American address, but he decided that the Anatilla representative was one or other of two men, Robson and Steinacker. Then he gave a luncheon to some of his friends, and proceeded to sound them cautiously about the retired railway man at Wynberg, whose name was Barrowman.

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skill and endurance. So as they ate their luncheon on the dusty tableland he expanded happily.

It appeared that he thought of retiring for good to England. He had climbed everything in South Africa worth climbing, including the buttresses of Mont Aux Sources, and he wanted to be nearer the classic ground of his hobby. Also he dreamed of an English garden where he could acclimatise much of the Cape flora. . . . He would like, however, to realise some of his South African holdings. All his eggs were in the one basket, and, if he was going to settle at home, he ought to distribute them better. In England one could not watch South African stocks with the requisite closeness. "The trouble," he said, "is that it's a rotten time to change investments. Good enough for the buyer, but the devil for the seller. . . . Do you know anything about these things?"

"A little," Tavanger answered. "You see, they're more or less my profession. I shall be delighted to help you. If your things are sound, there is generally a fair market to be had, if you take a little pains to find it."

So three hours later in the Wynberg bungalow he went with Barrowman over his holdings. Most were good enough—town lots in Johannesburg, Bulawayo and Durban, investment company debentures, one or two deep-level gold properties which were paying high dividends; but there was a certain amount of junk, mostly land development companies where Barrowman had come in on the ground-floor. "Oh, and there's those Daphnes," Barrowman said wryly. "God knows why I ever got let in for them. There was a man at

It turned out that he was a well-known figure, a vigorous youth of sixty whose hobbies were botany and mountaineering. Now, Tavanger in his day had been an active member of the Alpine Club—he had begun climbing as a boy with his Swiss relations—and he was delighted to find a ready-made link.

It was arranged that he should meet Barrowman at dinner at the house of one of his friends at Muizenberg, and presently, on a superb moonlit night, with the long tides breaking beneath them on the white sands, he sat on the Muizenberg stoep next a trim little man who overflowed with pent-up enthusiasms. Barrowman had made a comfortable small fortune by his profession, and was now bent on sampling all the enjoyments which had been crowded out of a busy life. He was a bachelor, and had settled at Wynberg in order that he might be near Table Mountain, on whose chimneys and traverses he was the chief authority. Tavanger conjured up his early ardour, asked eagerly concerning the different routes and the quality of the rock, and gladly accepted Barrowman's offer to take him next day to the summit of the mountain.

They spent some very hot and fatiguing hours in kloofs which were too full of vegetable matter for comfort, and reached the summit by a difficult and not over-safe chimney. Tavanger was badly out of practice and training, and at one point was in serious danger. However, the top was won at last, and Barrowman was in the best of tempers, for it pleased him to find one who was some years his junior, and who had done most of the legendary courses in the Alps, so manifestly his inferior in

almost wept when I gave him my cheque for the lot. I really felt that I had done well by him, for, when you added the worthless Voortrekkers, I had paid pretty nearly par for the Daphne shares."

The next step was easy. The lawyer-politician, Dove by name, Tavanger had already met. He was frankly hard up, for he had spoiled a good practice by going into Parliament, and at the same time was determined to stick to politics, where his chief ambition lay. He knew all about Tavanger by repute, and actually sought him out to consult him. Tavanger was friendly, and declared himself anxious to help a man who had so sound a notion of the future of the Empire. A directorship or two might be managed—he controlled various concerns with South African boards—he would look into the matter when he got home. He counselled Dove to give as much time as he could to the Bar—he would do what he could to put work in his way. Thus encouraged, Dove opened his heart. He wanted money, not in the future but now—there were payments due on certain irrigated lands which he owned, and he did not want to have the mortgages foreclosed. But everything was at such ruination prices, and if he sold any of his sound investments it would be at a hideous loss. Tavanger asked him what he had, and in the list given him was a block of Daphne shares about which Dove was blasphemous. Tavanger appeared to consider deeply.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at length. "I'll buy your Daphnes. I might make something of them. They're not worth half a crown to the ordinary operator, but they're worth more

than that to me. To *me*, and I believe to scarcely anybody else. I'll give you sixteen and sixpence for them."

Dove stared and stammered. "Do you mean it? It's tremendous. But I can't take it, you know. It's pure charity."

"Not a bit of it," said Tavanger. "I quote you sixteen and six because I happen to know that that was the price paid for a block in London the other day by a man who was very much in my position. It's a gamble, of course, but that's my business."

As Tavanger was leaving the club, where he had been having an early lunch with Dove, he ran into Barrowman in the company of a lean, spectacled gentleman, whose particular quality of tan proclaimed that he had just landed from a sea voyage. Barrowman was effusive in his greetings and longings for another talk before Tavanger sailed. "I can't wait now," he said. "I've got to give a man luncheon. A fellow called Steinacker, an American who has an introduction to me from one of my old directors."

Tavanger took the night mail to Johannesburg, feeling that he had won his first race by a short head.

The next proposition was tougher. The Johannesburg stockbroker, Nall by name, to whom he had taken the precaution of being introduced by cable from London, received him royally, insisted on putting him up in his big house in the Sachsenwald, and gave a dinner for him at the Rand Club, to which most of the magnates of the place were bidden. Tavanger was of course a household name in these circles, and there was much curiosity as to

what he was doing in South Africa. He stuck, both in private talk and in his interviews with the Press, to his original story : he was there for a holiday—had long wanted to fly Africa from north to south—was becoming interested in commercial aviation—hoped to get some notion of how South Africa was shaping—had some idea of a new steel industry. He made a speech at the Rand Club dinner in which he expounded certain views on the currency situation throughout the globe and the importance of discovering new gold-fields. For three days he feasted and talked at large, never saying anything that mattered, but asking innumerable questions. Nall watched him with a quizzical smile.

On the third evening, in the seclusion of the smoking-room, his host took off his glasses and looked at him with his shrewd eyes, a little bleared with the Rand dust.

" Seriously, Mr. Tavanger, what are you here for? That steel business story won't wash, you know."

" Why not? " Tavanger asked.

" Because you have already turned down that proposition when it was made to you."

" May not a man have second thoughts? "

" He may, but not you—not after the reasons you gave last year."

Tavanger laughed. " All right. Have it your own way. Would you be surprised to learn that the simple explanation is true? I wanted a holiday. I wanted to fling my heels and get rid of London for a month or two. I was getting infernally stale. Are you clever enough to realise that the

plain reason is often the right one? . . . But being here, I had to pretend that I had some sort of business purpose. It's a kind of *lèse-majesté* for people like me to get quit of the shop."

"Good," said Nall. "That is what I thought myself. But being here, I take it you're not averse to doing a little business."

"By no means. I have had my fling, and now I'm quite ready to pick up anything that's going. What have you to suggest? I had better say straight off that I don't want gold mines. I don't understand that business, and I've always made it a rule never to touch them. And I don't want town lots. I carry enough of the darned things in the city of London."

"Good," said Nall again. "Now we understand each other. I wonder what would interest you."

That was the first of several long and intricate talks. If Tavanger brought up the subject of Daphnes at once, Nall would become suspicious and ask a fancy price—or refuse to sell at all, for there was no such motive as in the cases of Dove and Barrowman. His only hope was to reach the subject by the method of exhaustion. So Tavanger had to listen while all the assets of South Africa were displayed before him—ferrous and non-ferrous metals, rubies in the Lebombo hills, electric power from the streams that descended the Berg, new types of irrigation, new fruits and cereals and fibres, a variety of fancy minerals. He professed to be interested in a new copper area, and in the presence of corundum in the eastern mountains. Then Nall mentioned michelite. In a level voice

Tavanger asked about it, and was given a glowing account of the possibilities of the Daphne Concessions.

"That subject rather interests me," Tavanger said, "for I know a German chemist, Sprenger, who is the chief authority on it. They're up against every kind of snag, which they won't get over in our time, but it might be the kind of thing to buy and lock away for one's grandchildren."

Nall demurred. On the contrary, michelite was on the edge of a mighty boom, and in a year Daphnes would be soaring. When Tavanger shook his head, he repeated his view, and added, by way of confirmation, that he held 10,000 Daphnes which he meant at all costs to stick to.

"I have some michelite shares, I think," said Tavanger, after an apparent effort of reminiscence, "and like you, I shall stick to them. Indeed, I wouldn't mind getting a few more. My children will curse me, but my grandchildren may bless me."

Again and again they went over the list, and Tavanger gave the impression that he was seriously interested in corundum, moderately in copper, and very mildly in michelite, though he thought the last not practical business at the moment. He adopted the pose of a man who had no desire for anything more, but might take a few oddments if his capricious appetite were tempted. Presently he discovered that Nall was very keen about the corundum affair, and was finding it difficult to get together the requisite working capital. Tavanger poured all the cold water he could on the scheme, but Nall's faith was proof against it.

"I want you to help, Mr. Tavanger. I want your money, but still more I want your name."

Tavanger yawned. "You've been uncommonly kind to me," he said, "and I'd like to give you a hand. Also I rather fancy picking up some little thing wherever I go, just as a tripper buys souvenirs. But your Lebombo business is quite outside my beat."

"Is that final?" Nall asked.

"Yes. . . . Well, no—I'll tell you what I'll do. You want ready money, and I have a little in hand. I'll put up ten thousand for the Lebombo, and I'll buy your Daphne shares. There's no market for them at present, you tell me. Well, I'll make you a fair offer. I'll give you sixteen and six, which was about the best price last year for Anatillas."

Nall wrinkled his brow.

"Why do you want them?" he asked.

"Because they are in my line, which corundum isn't. I have already some michelite shares, as I told you, and I believe it's a good investment for my family."

"I would rather not sell."

"Then the whole deal is off. Believe me, my dear fellow, I shall be quite happy to go home without putting a penny into South Africa. I came out here literally for my health."

Then Nall tried to screw up the price for Daphnes, but there he met with such a final negative that he relinquished the attempt. The result was that two days later Tavanger took the train for Delagoa Bay, with 10,000 more Daphnes

to his credit and a liability for £10,000, his share in the underwriting of the coming flotation of the Lebombo Corundum Corporation.

From Lourenço Marquez he sailed to Beira, and ascended to the Rhodesian plateau. There he stepped off the plank into deepish waters. The two remaining holders of Daphnes lived in the country north of Salisbury, both a long distance from railhead, but fairly near each other. Tavanger decided to take Devenish first, who had a fruit farm in the hills about forty miles from a station. He was a little puffed up by his successes, and anticipated no difficulties; he did not trouble to enquire about Devenish or the other man, Greenlees, or to get introductions to them; he was inclined now to trust to his unaided powers of persuasion, and meant to drop in on them as a distinguished stranger touring the country.

It was early summer in those parts, when rain might be looked for, but so far the weather had been dry. The roads were in good order, and Tavanger hired a car in Salisbury in which he proposed to make the trip. But he had not gone twenty miles before the heavens opened. The country had been smoking with bush-fires, but these were instantly put out by a torrential deluge. The roads had never been properly engineered and had no real bottom, and in an hour or two the hard red grit had been turned into a foot or two of gummy red mud, while the shallow fords had swollen to lagoons. With immense difficulty the car reached the dorp on the railway line, which was the nearest point to Devenish's farm. Tavanger put up at the wretched hotel, and made enquiries.

He got hold of an old transport-driver called Potgieter, who told him that the car was as useless as a perambulator. His only chance of getting to Devenish next day was by cape-cart and a span of mules, and that, unless the rain stopped, was not very rosy.

Tavanger left the car and the driver in the dorp, and started next morning with Potgieter in the same relentless deluge. The transport-rider was a old hand at the game, but even he confessed that he had never travelled in worse conditions. The road was mostly impossible, so they took to the open veld among ant-heaps and meerkat holes which threatened to wrench the wheels off. The worst trouble was with the streams that came down from the hills on their left, each a tawny torrent. Also they struck many patches of marsh, which they had to circumnavigate, and in one vlei they spent an hour getting the wheels of the cart out of the mire. The mist hung close about them, and if Potgieter had not known the road like his own hand, they would have been wandering in circles. At a native village half-way, they heard that a bigger stream in front was impassable, but they managed to cross with the mules swimming, while Potgieter performed miracles with his long whip. But the end came when they were still five miles from their destination. The cape-cart smashed its axle in an extra deep mud-hole, and the rest of the journey was performed on foot, with Potgieter driving the mules before him. Soaked to the bone and mud to the eyes, Tavanger presented himself at Devenish's little farm. Instead of arriving in a lordly way in a touring car,

he appeared out of the mist, a very weary, hungry, and dishevelled tramp.

As it turned out it was the best thing that could have happened. Devenish was a simple, hospitable soul with a taste for letters, who had lately taken to himself a like-minded wife. He was profoundly suspicious of the dwellers in cities, especially the financial folk who played tricks with the market for his fruit and tobacco. He had inherited his Daphne holding from an uncle, and had personally never bought or sold a share in his life. Had Tavanger arrived in a smart car with the air of a moneyed man of affairs, Devenish would have looked on him with deep distrust. But this muddy and famished stranger, who was obviously an educated man, he took to his heart, prepared a hot bath for him, lent him dry clothes, and fed him handsomely on broiled chicken, green mealies and Afrikander sausages.

That night, while Potgieter puffed his deep-bowled pipe and dozed, Tavanger and Devenish talked of books and home. As luck would have it Mrs. Devenish came from that part of Norfolk where Tavanger for a long time had had a shoot, and they were able to identify common friends. The fruit-farmer was very much in love with his job, but both he and his wife were a little starved of conversation with their own kind, and that evening was a great occasion for them. Mrs. Devenish played Schubert on the cottage piano, and they all went to bed very good friends. Not a word had been spoken of business, for Tavanger had sized up his host and realised that he must proceed cautiously.

But the thing proved to be simplicity itself. Next morning came one of those breaks in the rain, when a hot sun shone on a steaming earth. Devenish conducted his guest round his property—the orchards of peach and apricot and naartje, the tobacco lands, the dam shining like a turquoise amid the pale emerald of the alfalfa fields. He told him the tale of his successes and his difficulties; even with the bad prices of tobacco he was covering costs (he had some private income to live on), but he badly needed more capital for development. He wanted to make a second dam and lay out a new orchard for a special kind of plum, but he was determined not to mortgage his farm. Where was the money to come from? Tavanger enquired tactfully about his possessions, and heard about the 7,000 Daphne shares which he had inherited. Devenish had already made some attempt to sell these, for he had no views on the subject of miche-lite, but had found them unsaleable except at a price which he regarded as a swindle. He was such an innocent that he believed that if a share was nominally worth a pound any man who offered him less was trying to cheat him. . . . The upshot was that Tavanger bought the 7,000 Daphnes, but had to buy them at par. He realised that he might argue till Doomsday before he got Devenish to understand the position, and that any attempt at bargaining would awake suspicions in his host. He had never met a man so compounded of caution and ignorance.

Devenish had a blacksmith's shop on his farm, and his overseer was a good mechanic, so the cape-cart was fetched from the mud-hole and given a

new axle. The rain kept off that day, but the next morning when they started for Greenlees' mine it began again in grim earnest. They had about fifty miles to go through a wild bit of country, which did not contain even a native village, and the road was at its best only a scar on the veld, and, when it ran through bush, scarcely wider than a foot-track. Devenish insisted on providing them with plenty of food, which was fortunate, for they took three days to reach Greenlees. . . .

This was the best part of Tavanger's story, but I must confine myself to the bare outline. They struck a river at what was usually a broad shallow ford, but was now a lake of yeasty water. It was the only possible place, for above and below the stream ran in a defile among rocks, and the whole outfit was nearly drowned before they made the crossing. But they found themselves on an island, for another branch of the river, broader, deeper and swifter, confronted them a hundred yards farther on. This proved hopeless, and Potgieter tried to recross the first branch, with the notion of making a circuit and finding an easier ford farther up. But the water was rising every minute, and even the transport-rider's stout heart failed him. He announced that there was nothing to be done except to wait for the river to fall. Happily the island was high ground, so there was no risk of its being overflowed.

They spent two nights and a day in that dismal place, which in twelve hours had shrunk to the limits of about a couple of acres. It was covered with low scrub, but this was no shelter from the unceasing rain. Potgieter made a scherm for the

mules out of wait-a-bit thorns, and inside it rigged up a sort of tent with the cover of the cape-cart. It was as well that he did this, for the two men were not the only refugees on the island. Various kinds of buck had been cut off by the flood, and bush-pig, and the mules were in a perpetual ferment, which Potgieter said was due to lions. Tavanger more than once thought he saw a tawny, slinking shadow in the undergrowth. They got a sort of fire going, but there was no decent fuel to burn, and the best they could do was a heap of smoking twigs. Potgieter shot a brace of guineafowl, which they cooked for dinner in the scanty ashes. He would not let Tavanger stir from the scherm, for he said that the island would be full of storm-stayed snakes and other unhallowed oddments. So the wretched pair had to twiddle their thumbs for thirty-six hours in an atmosphere like a Turkish bath, coughing and choking by the green-wood fire, and subsisting for the most part on Devenish's cold viands. Unluckily they had neither tea nor coffee, and their tobacco ran out. Tavanger got a furious cold in his head and rheumatic pains in his back, but the worst discomfort was the utter boredom ; for Potgieter had no small talk, and slept most of the time.

Late on the second night the rain ceased, and revealed a wonderful sky of stars. On the second morning the river had fallen sufficiently to be forded, and mules and men, very stiff and miserable, started off for Greenlees. But their troubles were not over, for the valley they presently struck seemed to have melted into primeval slime, and when they got on to the higher ground they had

to make lengthy detours to circumvent landslips. It was almost dark when they reached the mine, and it took Greenlees some time, Tavanger said, to realise that they were human. When he did, when he understood who Tavanger was—having spent some time in a London office he knew him by repute—and recognised Potgieter as a man with whom he had once hunted, he was hospitable enough. In an empty *rondavel* he filled two wooden tubs with scalding water, into which he put a tin of mustard and a can of sheep-dip, declaring that it was the only way to stave off pneumonia.

Greenlees proved the simplest of the five to deal with, for he was an enthusiast about michelite. He was a Scotsman from Berwickshire, who had had a sound university training and knew a good deal about metallurgical chemistry as well as about engineering. He had been employed at the Daphne mine when it first began, and had believed so firmly in its prospects that he had scraped up every penny he could muster at the time and bought a biggish holding. Then he had quarrelled with the manager, but his faith in the concern had not wavered. He declared that it was abominably managed, that the costs were far too high, and the marketing arrangements rudimentary, but nevertheless, he was convinced that before long it would be one of the most lucrative concerns in the country. He anticipated, for one thing, some discovery which would bring down the smelting costs. "I'll hold on," he said, "though I should have to go wanting the breeks to do it."

Tavanger, seeing the sort of man he had to deal

with, put his cards on the table. He told Greenlees frankly that he meant to control Daphne. He described, as only Tavanger could describe, the manœuvres by which he had acquired the big London block, his journey to South Africa ("God, but you're the determined one," said Greenlees), his doings at the Cape and in Johannesburg, and his wild trek in the Rhodesian rains.

"I want to buy your holding, Mr. Greenlees," he concluded. "I will pay any price you fix, and will contract to sell you the shares back on demand any time after next June at the price I gave for them. What I want is control of the stock till then, and for the privilege I am ready to pay you a bonus of one thousand pounds."

Of course Greenlees consented, for he saw that Tavanger was a believer like himself, and so far he had not met another. He asked various questions. Tavanger said nothing about the coming combine, but let him think that his view was the same as his own, a belief that presently a scientific discovery would make michelite a commodity of universal use. He mentioned having talked with Sprenger in Berlin, and Greenlees nodded respectfully.

They sat late into the night discussing the future. Greenlees explained the system at work at the Daphne mine, and how it could be bettered, and Tavanger then and there offered him the managership. It was a London company, and its annual shareholders' meeting fell in January; Tavanger proposed drastically to reconstruct both the English and South African boards and to reform the management.

"What about having a look at the place?" Greenlees asked. "You could easily look in on your way down country."

Tavanger shook his head. "I'm not a technical expert," he said, "and I would learn very little. I've always made it a rule never to mix myself up with things I don't understand. But I reckon myself a fair judge of men, and I shall be content to trust you."

As they went to bed Greenlees showed him a telegram. "Did you ever hear of this fellow? Steinacker or Stemacker his name is. He wants to see me—has an introduction from the chairman of my company. I wired to him to come along, and he is turning up the day after to-morrow."

This was the story which Tavanger told me that night in my rooms. His adventures seemed to have renewed his youth, for he looked actually boyish, and I understood that half the power of the man—and indeed of anyone who succeeds in his line—lay just in a boyish readiness to fling his cap on the right occasion over the moon.

"I deserve to win out, don't you think?" he said, "for I've risked my neck by air, land and water—not to mention black mambas. . . . I should like to have seen Steinacker's face when he had finished gleaning in my tracks. . . . The next thing is to get to grips with Glaubsteins. Oh yes, I'll keep you informed. You're the only man I can talk to frankly about this business, and half the fun of an adventure is to be able to gossip about it."

3

I saw nothing of Tavanger again till the end of February, when he appeared as a witness for the defence in a case in which I led for the plaintiff, and I had the dubious pleasure of cross-examining him. I say "dubious," for he was one of the most formidable witnesses I have ever met, candid, accurate, self-possessed and unshakable. Two days later I had to make a speech—an old promise to him—at the annual meeting, in the hall of the Fletchers' Company, of the children's hospital of which he was chairman. There I saw a new Tavanger, one who spoke of the hospital and its work as a man speaks of his family in a moment of expansion, who had every detail at his fingers' ends and who descanted on its future with a sober passion. I was amazed, till I remembered that this was one of his two hobbies. He was Master of the Company, so he gave me tea afterwards in his private room, and expanded on the new dental clinic which he said was the next step in the hospital's progress.

"I mean to present the clinic," he told me, "if things turn out well. That is why I'm so keen about this Daphne business. . . ."

He stopped and smiled at me.

"I know that I'm reputed to be very well off, and I can see that you're wondering why I don't present it in any case, since presumably I can afford it. Perhaps I can, but that has never been my way. I have for years kept a separate account which I call my 'gambling fund,' and into it goes whatever comes to me by the grace of God outside

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"Oh, yes, they're nibbling hard. I hear that Steinacker managed to pick up about ten thousand shares in South Africa, and now they are stuck fast. They must come to me, and they've started a voluptuous curve in my direction. You know the way people like Glaubsteins work. The man who approaches you may be a simple fellow who never heard of them. They like to have layers of agents between themselves and the man they're after. Well, I've had offers for my Daphnes through one of my banks, and through two insurance companies, and through"—he mentioned the name of a solid and rather chauvinistic British financial house which was supposed to lay a rigid embargo on anything speculative. His intelligence department, he said, was pretty good, and the connection had been traced.

"They've offered me par," he continued. "The dear innocents! The fact is, they can't get on without me, and they know it, but at present they are only manœuvring for position. When we get down to real business, we'll talk a different language."

As I have said, I had guessed that Tavanger was working on a piece of knowledge which he had got at Flambard, and I argued that this could only be a world-wide merger of michelite interests. He knew this for a fact, and was therefore gambling on what he believed to be a certainty. Consequently he could afford to wait. I am a novice in such matters, but it seemed to me that the only possible snag was Sprenger. Sprenger was a man of genius, and though he was loyal to the German company, I had understood from Tavanger that

there was a working arrangement between that company and the Anatilla. At any moment he might make some discovery which would alter the whole industrial status of michelite, and no part of the benefit of such a discovery would go to the Daphne Concessions. I mentioned my doubt.

"I realise that," said Tavanger, "and I am keeping Sprenger under observation. Easy enough to manage, for I have many lines down in Berlin. My information is that for the moment he has come to a halt. Indeed, he has had a breakdown, and has been sent off for a couple of months to some high place in the Alps. Also Anatilla and Rosas are not on the friendliest terms at present. Glaubsteins have been trying to buy out the Germans, and since they have lent them money, I fancy the method of procedure was rather arbitrary. They'll get them in the end, of course, but just now relations are rather strained, and it will take a fair amount of time to ease them."

The word "time" impressed me. Clearly Tavanger believed that he had a free field up to the 10th of June—after which nothing mattered.

"I'm a babe in finance," I said. "But wouldn't it be wise to screw up Anatilla to a good offer as soon as possible, and close with it. It's an uncertain world, and you never know what trick fortune may play you."

He smiled. "You're a cautious lawyer, and I'm a bit of an adventurer. I mean to play this game with the stakes high. The way I look at it is this. Glaubsteins have unlimited resources, and they believe firmly in the future of michelite. So for that matter do I. They want to have control of

the world output against the day when the boom comes. They can't do without me, for I own what is practically the largest supply and certainly the best quality. Very well, they must treat."

"Yes, but they may spin out the negotiations if you open your mouth too wide. There is no reason why they should be in a hurry. And meantime something may happen to lower the value of your property. You never know."

He shook his head.

"No. I am convinced they will bring things to a head by midsummer."

He looked curiously at something which he saw in my face. In that moment he realised, I think, that I had divined his share in that morning session at Flambard.

4

A few weeks later I happened to run across a member of the firm of stockbrokers who did my modest business.

"You were asking about michelite in the autumn," he said. "There's a certain liveliness in the market just now. There have been a number of dealings in Daphnes—you mentioned them, I think—at rather a fancy price—round about eighteen shillings. I don't recommend them, but if you want something to put away you might do worse than buy Anatillas. For some reason or other their price has come down to twelve shillings. In my opinion you would be perfectly safe with them. Glaubsteins are behind them, you know, and Glaubsteins don't make mistakes. It would be a lock-up investment, but certain to appreciate."

I thanked him, but told him that I was not looking for any new investments.

That very night I met Tavanger at dinner and, since the weather was dry and fine, we walked part of the way home together. I asked him what he had been doing to depress Anatillas.

"We've cut prices," he replied. "We could afford to do so, for our costs of getting michelite out of the ground have always been twenty-five per cent. lower than the other companies'. We practically quarry the stuff, and the ore is in a purer state. Under Greenlees' management the margin is still greater, so we could afford a bold stroke. So far the result has been good. We have extended our market, and though we are making a smaller profit per ton, it has increased the quantity sold by about twenty per cent. But that, of course, wasn't my real object. I wanted to frighten Anatilla and make them more anxious to deal. I fancy I've rattled them a bit, for, as you seem to have observed, the price of their ordinaries has had a nasty jolt."

"Couldn't you force them down farther?" I suggested. "When you get them low enough you might be able to buy Anatilla and make the merger yourself."

"Not for worlds!" he said. "You don't appreciate the difference between the financier and the industrialist. Supposing I engineered the merger. I should be left with it on my hands till I could sell it to somebody else. I'm not the man who makes things, but the man who provides the money for other people to make them with. Besides, Glaubsteins would never sell—not on your

life. They've simply got to control a stuff with the possibilities of michelite. With their enormous mineral and metal interests, and all their commercial subsidiaries, they couldn't afford to let it get out of their hands. They're immensely rich, and could put down a thousand pounds for every hundred that any group I got together could produce. Believe me, they'll hang on to michelite till their last gasp. And rightly—because they are users. They have a policy for dealing with it. I'm only a pirate who sails in and demands ransom because they've become a little negligent on the voyage."

I asked how the negotiations were proceeding.

"According to plan. We've got rid of some of the agency layers, and have now arrived at one remove from the principals. My last step, as I have said, woke them up. Javerts have now taken a hand in it, and Javerts, as you may or may not know, do most of the English business for Glaubsteins. They are obviously anxious to bring things to a head pretty soon, for they have bid me sixty shillings a share."

"Take it, man," I said. "It will give you more than a hundred per cent. profit."

"Not enough. Besides, I want to get alongside Glaubsteins themselves. No intermediaries for me. That's bound to happen too. When you see in the Press that Mr. Bronson Jane has arrived in Europe, then you may know that we're entering on the last lap."

We parted at Hyde Park Corner, and I watched him set off westward with his shoulders squared and his step as light as a boy's. This Daphne

adventure was assuredly renewing Tavanger's youth.

Some time in May I read in my morning paper the announcement of Sprenger's death. *The Times* had an obituary which mentioned michelite as only one of his discoveries. It said that no chemist had made greater practical contributions to industry in our time, but most of the article was devoted to his purely scientific work, in which it appeared that he had been among the first minds in Europe. This was during the General Election, when I had no time for more than a hasty thought as to how this news would affect Daphne.

When it was all over and I was back in London, I had a note from Tavanger asking me to dinner. We dined alone in his big house in Kensington Palace Gardens, where he kept his picture collection. I remembered that I could not take my eyes off a superb Vermeer which hung over the dining-room mantelpiece. I was in that condition of bodily and mental depression which an election always induces in me, and I was inclined to resent Tavanger's abounding vitality. For he was in the best of spirits, with just a touch of that shamefacedness with which a man, who has been holidaying extravagantly, regards one who has had his nose to the grindstone. He showed no desire to exhibit his treasures; he wanted to talk about michelite.

Sprenger was dead—a tragedy for the world of science, but a fortunate event for Daphne. No longer need a bombshell be feared from that quarter. He seemed to have left no records

behind him which might contain the germ of a possible discovery ; indeed, for some months he had been a sick and broken man.

“ It’s a brutal world,” said Tavanger, “ when I can regard with equanimity the disappearance of a great man who never did me any harm. But there it is. Sprenger was the danger-point for me, and he was Anatilla’s trump card. His death brought Bronson Jane across the Atlantic by the first boat. His arrival was in the papers, but I dare say you haven’t been reading them very closely.”

It appeared that Jane had gone straight to Berlin, and, owing to the confusion caused by Sprenger’s death, had succeeded in acquiring the control of Rosas for Anatilla. That was the one advantage he could get out of the catastrophe. It was a necessary step towards the ultimate combine, but in practice it would not greatly help Anatilla, for Daphne remained the keystone. Two days ago Jane had arrived in England, and Tavanger had seen him.

“ You have never met Bronson Jane ? ” he asked. “ But you must know all about him. He is the new thing in American big business, and you won’t find a more impressive type on the globe. . . . Reasonably young—not much more than forty—rather good-looking and with charming manners. . . . A scratch golfer, and quite a considerable performer at polo, I believe. . . . The kind of education behind him which makes us all feel ignoramuses—good degree at college, the Harvard Law School, then a most comprehensive business training in America and Europe. . . . The sort of

man who is considered equally eligible for the presidency of a college, the charge of a department of State, or the control of a world-wide business corporation. We don't breed anything quite like it on this side. He is over here for Glaubsteins primarily, but he had to dash off to Geneva to make a speech on some currency question, and next week he is due in Paris for a conference about German reparations. To-morrow I believe he is dining with Geraldine and the politicians. He dined here last night alone with me, and knew rather more about my pictures than I knew myself, though books are his own particular hobby. A most impressive human being, I assure you. Agreeable too, the kind of man you'd like to go fishing with."

"Is the deal through?" I asked.

"Not quite. He was very frank. He said that Glaubsteins wanted Daphne because they could use it, whereas it was no manner of good to me. I was equally frank, and assented. Then he said that if I held out I would be encumbered with a thing I could not develop—never could develop, whereas Glaubsteins could bring it at once into their great industrial pool and be working day and night on its problems. All the more need for that since Sprenger was dead. Again I assented. He said that he believed firmly in michelite, and I said that so did I. Finally, he asked if I wanted anything more than to turn the thing over at a handsome profit. I said I wanted nothing more, only the profit must be handsome.

"So we started bargaining," Tavanger continued, "and I ran him up to eighty shillings.

There he stuck his toes into the ground, and not an inch could I induce him to budge. I assume that that figure was the limit of his instructions, and that he'd have to cable for fresh ones. He'll get them, I have no doubt. We've to meet again when he comes back from Paris."

"It seems to me an enormous price," I said. "In a few months you've forced the shares up from under par to four pounds. If it was my show I should be content with that."

"I want five pounds!" he said firmly. "That is the figure I fixed in my mind when I first took up the business, and I mean to have it."

He saw a doubt in my eye and went on. "I'm not asking anything unreasonable. Anatilla must have their merger, and in a year or two Daphnes will be worth more than five pounds to them—not to everybody, but to them. My terms are moderation itself compared with what Brock asked and got for his tin-pot railway in the Central Pacific merger, or Assher for his rotten newspapers. I'm giving solid value for the money. You should see Greenlees' reports. He says there is enough michelite in prospect to supply every steel-plant on earth for a century."

We smoked afterwards in the library, and I noticed a sheaf of plans on the table. Tavanger's eye followed mine.

"Yes, that's the lay-out for the new clinic. We mean to start building in the autumn."

5

I was in my chambers, dictating an opinion, when my clerk brought me Tavanger's card. I

had seen or heard nothing of him since that dinner at his house, and the financial columns of the Press had been silent about michelite. All I had noticed was a slight rise in Anatilla shares owing to the acquisition of Rosas, the news of which had been officially published in America. Bronson Jane seemed to be still in England, judging from the Press, and he had been pointed out to me on the other side of the table at a City dinner. It was a fine June evening, and I was just about to stretch my legs by strolling down to the House.

"The weather tempted me to walk home," said Tavanger, when I had dismissed my clerk and settled him in my only armchair, "and it suddenly occurred to me that I might catch you here. Can you give me ten minutes? I've a lot to tell you."

"It's all over? You've won, of course," I said. His air was so cheerful that it must mean victory.

He laughed—not ironically, or ruefully, but with robust enjoyment. Tavanger had certainly acquired a pleasant boyishness from this enterprise.

"On the contrary," he said, "I have found my Waterloo. I have abdicated and am in full retreat."

I could only stare.

"What on earth went wrong?" I stammered. "Who was your Wellington?"

"My Wellington?" he repeated. "Yes, that's the right question to ask. I struck a Wellington who was not my match perhaps, but he had the big battalions behind him. It wasn't Bronson Jane.

I had him in a cleft stick. It was a lad who was raised, I believe, in a Montana shack."

Then he told me the story. Sprenger had been under agreement with Anatilla to communicate to them from time to time the data on which he was busy. To these Glaubsteins had turned on their own research department, and they had put in charge of it a very brilliant young metallurgical chemist called Untermeyer. He had been working on michelite for the better part of two years, chiefly the problem of a simpler and more economical method of smelting. Well, as luck would have it, he stumbled on the missing link in the process which poor Sprenger had been searching for—had an inkling of it, said Tavanger with awe in his tone, just after Sprenger's death, and proved it beyond a peradventure on the very night when Bronson Jane had dined in Kensington Palace Gardens. Jane's cable for permission to make a higher bid for the Daphne shares was answered by a message which put a very different complexion on the business.

Glaubsteins had lost no time. They had cabled to take out provisional patents in every country in the world, and they had opened up negotiations with the chief American steel interests. There could be no doubt about the success of the new process. Even in its present form it brought down smelting costs by half, and it was doubtless capable of improvement. Michelite, instead of being a commodity with a restricted market, would soon have a world-wide use, and those who controlled michelite would reap a rich harvest.

Michelite *plus* the new patented process. That

was the whole point. The process had been thoroughly proven, and Tavanger said that there was no doubt that it could be fully protected by patents. The steel firms would work under a licence from Glaubsteins, and one of the terms of such a licence would be that they took their michelite from Anatilla. The steel industry on one side became practically a tied-house for Glaubsteins, and Daphne was left in the cold.

"It's a complete knock-out," said Tavanger. "Our lower mining costs and our purer quality, which enabled us to cut the price, don't signify at all. They are all washed out by the huge reduction in smelting costs under the new process. Nobody's going to buy an ounce of our stuff any more. It's quite true that if michelite gets into general use Glaubsteins will want our properties. But they can afford to wait and starve us out. They have enough to go on with in the Anatilla and Rosas mines. There never was a prettier calling of a man's bluff."

• I asked what he had done.

"Chucked in my hand. It was the only course. Bronson Jane was quite decent about it. He gave me par for my Daphne shares, which was far better than I could have hoped. Also, he agreed to my condition about keeping on Greenlees in the management. I am only about twenty thousand pounds to the bad, and I've had a lot of sport for my money. Funny to think that three weeks ago I could have got out of Daphne with a cool profit of one hundred and forty thousand."

"I am sorry about the clinic," I said.

"You needn't be," was the answer. "I mean

to present it just the same. This very afternoon I approved the final plans. It will be provided for out of my 'gambling fund,' according to my practice. I shall sell my Vermeer to pay for it. . . . It's a clinic for looking after children's teeth, but in the circumstances it would have been more appropriate if it had been for looking after their eyes. The gift is a sacrifice to the gods in token of my own blindness."

Tavanger had suddenly become serious.

"I think you guessed all along that I saw something that morning at Flambard. Well, I did, and I believed in it. I saw the announcement of the world-merger arranged by Anatilla. That is to say, I knew with perfect certainty that one thing was going to happen. If I hadn't known it, if I had gone in for Daphnes as an ordinary speculation, I would have been content to take my profit at two or three or four pounds. As it is, that infernal atom of accurate knowledge has cost me twenty thousand.

"But it was worth it," he added, getting up and reaching for his hat, "for I have learned one thing which I shall never forget, and which I commend to your notice. Our ignorance of the future has been wisely ordained of Heaven. For unless man were to be like God and know everything, it is better that he should know nothing. If he knows one fact only, instead of profiting by it he will assuredly land in the soup."

XLVII: THE RT. HON. DAVID MAYOT

" I once did see
In my young travels through Armenia,
An angrie Unicorne in his full carier
Charge with too swift a foot a Jeweller,
That watcht him for the Treasure of his browe ;
And ere he could get shelter of a tree,
Naile him with his rich Antler to the Earth."

GEORGE CHAPMAN, *Bussy D'Ambois*

I

I MUST make it clear at the outset that I was not in Mayot's confidence during the year the events of which I am about to record. Goodeve and Reggie Daker confided in me, and, through a series of accidents, I stumbled into Tavanger's inner life. Also I came to have full knowledge of Charles Ottery's case. But I only knew Mayot slightly, and we were opponents in the House, so, although our experiences at Flambard brought us a little nearer, we were far from anything like intimacy. But I realised that, under Moe's spell, he had seen something which had affected him deeply, and I studied closely his political moves to see if I could get a clue to that something. As a matter of fact, before Christmas I guessed what the revelation had been, and my guess proved correct. Later, when the whirligig of politics had brought Mayot and myself into closer touch, I learned from him some of the details which I now set forth.

First of all let me state exactly what he saw. For a second of time he had a glimpse of the first *Times* leader a year ahead ; his eyes fell somewhere about the middle of it. The leader dealt with India, and a speech of the Prime Minister on the

subject. By way of variation the writer used the Prime Minister's name in one sentence, and the name was Waldemar. Now, the Labour Party was then in office under Sir Derrick Trant, and Mr. Waldemar was the leader of the small, compact, and highly efficient Liberal group. Within a year's time, therefore, a remarkable adjustment of parties would take place, and the head of what was then by far the smallest party would be called upon to form a Government.

This for a man like Mayot was tremendous news—how tremendous will appear from a short recital of the chief features in his character. He was that rare thing in the class to which he belonged, a professional politician. A trade-union secretary looks to a seat in Parliament as a kind of old-age pension, and the ranks of Labour are for the most part professional. But nowadays the type is uncommon—except in the case of a few famous families—among the middle and upper classes. Mayot would have made a good eighteenth-century politician, for the parliamentary game was the very breath of his nostrils. All his life he had been the typical good boy and prize pupil. At school he had not been regarded as clever, but he had worked like a beaver; at the University there were many who called him stupid, but nevertheless he had won high honours in the schools. It was the same with games. He was never a good cricketer, but he was in his School Eleven, and at Cambridge, by dint of assiduous professional coaching in the vacations, he managed to attain his Blue—and failed disastrously in the 'Varsity match. He seemed to have the knack of just getting what he

wanted with nothing to spare, but, since the things that he wanted were numerous and important, he presented a brilliant record to the world.

He was the only son of a well-to-do Lancashire manufacturer, and had no need to trouble about money. He was devouringly ambitious—not to do things, but to be things. I doubt if he cared much for any political cause, but he was set upon becoming a prominent statesman. He began as a Tory Democrat, an inheritor of some threads of Disraeli's mantle. He went to Germany to study industrial problems, lived at a settlement in Rotherhithe, even did a spell of manual labour in a Birmingham factory—all the earnest gestures that are supposed to imply a tender heart and a forward-looking mind. He got into Parliament just before the War as a Conservative Free-trader for a Midland county constituency where his father had a house, and made himself rather conspicuous by a mild support of the Government's Irish Home Rule policy. In the War he lay very low; he had opportunely remembered that his family had been Quakers, and he had something to do, from well back at the base, with a Quaker ambulance. After peace he came out strong for the League of Nations, bitterly criticised the Coalition, was returned in '22 as an Independent, made a spectacular crossing of the floor of the House, and in '23 was the Labour member for a mining area in Durham, with a majority of five figures. He was an under-secretary in the Labour Government of '29, and, when Trant became Prime Minister, he entered his Cabinet as Home Secretary. As such he was responsible for the highly controversial

Factory Bill to which I have referred earlier in this story.

A rich bachelor, he had no other interest than public life, or rather every other interest was made to subserve that end. He used to say grandly, in Bacon's phrase, that he had "espoused the State," which was true enough if husband and wife become one flesh, for he saw every public question through the medium of his own career. In many ways he was not a bad fellow; indeed, you would have said the worst of him in calling him an *arriviste* and a professional politician.

The first point to remember is that he had not a very generous allowance of brains, but made his share go a long way. He carefully nursed his reputation, for he knew well that he had no great margin. He cherished his dignity, too, cultivated a habit of sardonic speech, and obviously longed to be respected and feared. A few simple souls thought him formidable, and most people esteemed his industry, for he toiled at every job he undertook, and left nothing to chance. For myself, I never could take him quite seriously. He was excellent at a prepared statement, which any Treasury clerk could do as well as a Minister, but when you got to grips with him in debate he funked and rode off on a few sounding platitudes. Also I cannot imagine any man, woman or child being moved by his harangues, for he had about as much magnetism as a pillar-box.

The second thing to remember is that he knew that he was second-rate, in everything except his industry and the intensity of his ambition. Therefore he was a great student of tactics. He was

determined to be Prime Minister, and believed that by a close study of the possible moves of the political cat he might succeed. So far he had done well, for he would never have had Cabinet rank if he had remained a Tory. But one realised that he was not quite easy, and that his eyes were always lifting anxiously over the party fence. Let me add that most people did not suspect his gnawing ambition, or his detachment from anything that might be called principles, for there was a heavy, almost unctuous, earnestness about his oratorical manner. He was clever enough, when the ice was thin, not to be too fluent, but to let broken sentences and homely idioms attest the depth of his convictions.

Believing firmly in Moe, he believed in the fragment of revelation which had been vouchsafed him, and was set on making the most of it. Waldemar, the Liberal leader, would be Prime Minister a year hence, and he pondered deeply how he could turn this piece of news to his advantage. . . . The first thing was to discover how it could possibly come about. He naturally thought first of a coalition between Labour and Liberal, but a little reflection convinced him of its unlikelihood, for Trant and Waldemar were the toughest kind of incompatibles.

Waldemar was a relic of Victorian Liberalism, a fanatical Free-trader, an individualist of the old rock. He was our principal exponent of the League of Nations, and had made an international reputation by his work for world peace. By profession a banker, he looked like a most impressive cleric—Anglican, not Nonconformist—with his lean, high-boned face, his shaggy eyebrows and his

superb, resonant voice. He was far the best speaker in the House, for he could reel off, without preparation, model eighteenth-century prose, and he was also a formidable debater; but he was a poor parliamentarian, for his mind lacked flexibility. He awed rather than conciliated, and, with his touch of fanaticism, was apt to be an inept negotiator.

Derrick Trant was his exact opposite. He was the most English thing that God ever made, and, like most typical Englishmen, was half Scots. He had drifted into the Labour Party out of a quixotic admiration for the doings of the British rank-and-file in the War, and he proved extraordinarily useful in keeping that precarious amalgam together. For all sections both liked and trusted him, the solid Trade Union lot and the young bloods alike, for his simplicity and single-heartedness. He had clearly no axe to grind, and the ordinary Labour man was willing to be led by one whose ancestors had fought at Crécy; the extremists respected his honesty, and the moderates believed in his common sense. He represented indeed the greatest common measure of party feeling. He had instincts rather than principles, but his instincts were widely shared, and his guileless exterior concealed a real shrewdness. I have heard him again and again in the House pull his side out of a mess by his powers of conciliation. He made no secret of his dislike of Waldemar. It was the secular antipathy of the nationalist to the internationalist, the Englishman to the cosmopolitan, the opportunist to the doctrinaire, the practical man to the potential fanatic.

Mayot soon decided that there was nothing doing in that quarter. The alliance, which would put Waldemar into office, must be with the Tories. At first sight it seemed impossible. The party to which I have the honour to belong had been moving steadily towards Protection, and had preached a stringent policy of safeguarding as the first step towards the cure of unemployment. Waldemar had taken the field against us, and seemed to hope to engineer a Liberal revival on a Free-trade basis, and so repeat the triumph of 1906. On the other hand, there was the personality of our leader to be remembered. Geraldine was by far the greatest parliamentarian of our time and the adroitest party chief. Like Mayot, he was a professional, and the game was never out of his mind. Being mostly Irish in blood, he had none of Trant's Englishness or Waldemar's iron dogmas; his weapons were endless ingenuity, audacity and humour. He wanted to return to power, and might use the Liberals to oust the Government. But in that case why should Waldemar be Prime Minister? Geraldine would never kill Charles to make James king. . . . Mayot could reach no conclusion, and resolved to wait and watch.

The parliamentary session through six blistering weeks dragged itself to a close. The Budget debate was concluded after eight all-night sittings, the Factory Bill passed its third reading and went to the Lords, and there was the usual massacre of lesser measures. It had been Mayot's habit to go to Scotland for the autumn vacation, for he had a good grouse moor and was a keen shot. But that

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year he changed his plans and resolved to stalk Waldemar.

Now, Waldemar was something of a valetudinarian, and every year, after the labours of the session, was accustomed to put himself for some weeks in the hands of an eminent physician who dwelt in the little town of Erdbach in the Black Forest. Moreover, Waldemar was not like Geraldine and Mayot himself; he had hobbies other than politics, and, just as Sir Derrick Trant was believed to be more interested in Gloucester cattle, wild white clover and dry-fly fishing than in Parliament, so Waldemar was popularly supposed to prefer the study of birds to affairs of State. So Mayot, professing anxiety about his blood pressure, became an inmate of Dr. Daimler's *kurhaus*, and prepared himself for his task by a reading of small popular works on ornithology.

At Erdbach he spent three weeks. I happened to meet him there, for I stopped at the principal hotel for two days while motoring to Switzerland, and ran across him in Waldemar's company while taking an evening walk. Waldemar had no particular liking for Mayot, but he had nothing definitely against him except his politics, and the two had never been much pitted against each other in the House. When I saw them they seemed to have reached a certain degree of intimacy, and Mayot was listening intelligently to a discourse on the Alpine swift, and trying to identify a specimen of tit which Waldemar proclaimed was found in Britain only in the Spey valley. The Liberal leader was in a holiday mood, and he was flattered, no doubt, by Mayot's respectful docility.

He talked, it seemed, a great deal of politics, and one of Mayot's suspicions was confirmed. He was slightly more civil about the Tories than about the Government. Geraldine, indeed, he profoundly distrusted, but he was quite complimentary about certain of Geraldine's colleagues. And he made two significant remarks. British politics, he thought, were moving back to the old two-party division, and in his opinion the most dangerous reactionary force was Sir Derrick Trant. Trant was the legitimate leader and the natural exponent of die-hard Conservatism—a class-consciousness which would in the long run benefit the capitalist, and a chauvinism which might plunge his country into war. . . . After a rather tedious three weeks Mayot returned to his neglected grouse, with a good deal of vague information about birds, and a clear conviction that there had been several *pourparlers* between Waldemar and the Tories. He seemed to have got the pointer he wanted.

But a fortnight later he changed his mind. Geraldine's chief lieutenant, a man of whom Waldemar had spoken with approval, addressed a political demonstration in the park of an Aberdeenshire castle. The speech, which became famous as the "Issachar speech," was a violent attack upon the Liberals. Labour was dismissed as a confusion of thought based upon honourable inclinations, but Liberalism was denounced as a deliberate blindness, an ossification of heart and an atrophy of brain. What were the boasted "Liberal principles," the speaker asked, but dead and decomposing relics? Waldemar was described as Issachar, an "ass between two burdens," one being

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his precious dogmas and the other a deadweight of antediluvian jealousies and fears.

Mayot, who read the speech one evening after coming in from a grouse-drive, decided with a sigh that he must try a cast on another line.

2

The autumn session began under the shadow of unemployment. The figures were the worst since the War, and it was generally believed would pass the three million point by Christmas. Industries which six months before had been slightly on the up-grade were now going back, and industries which had been slightly depressed were now going downhill with a rush. People began to talk of a national emergency Government, and a speech of Trant's was interpreted as a feeler. Mayot pricked up his ears and set himself to study the omens.

It was clear that there was no friendliness between Waldemar and Geraldine. The spirit of the Issachar speech was apparent in the first debate, and there were some brisk passages in the House between the two leaders. Then Geraldine went on the stump in Scotland and the industrial north. His one theme was unemployment, and he had enormous meetings everywhere, with enthusiastic overflows. He really felt the tragedy of the situation, and he gave the unemployed the feeling that he understood their case and would stick at nothing to find a remedy. There was no doubt that he made headway as against the inertness of the Prime Minister, who was in the hands of the Treasury officials, and the stubborn formalism of Waldemar.

At Durham he outlined his programme, the chief point in which was a new emigration policy. Thousands, he said, had been permanently disinherited from the work for which they had been trained ; certain industries must face the fact of a permanent reduction to a lower level ; what was to be done with the displaced ? Trant had a transference scheme working, but it could only account for a fraction. The resources of the Empire must be brought in to meet the deficiencies of one part of it. The Dominions had virgin land, unharnessed power ; Britain had the human material ; the situation was ripe for a deal. Geraldine proposed to short-circuit the whole existing emigration machinery. He had been in Canada the year before, and had fixed upon two areas, one in British Columbia and the other on the Peace river, for a great national experiment. He proposed to buy or lease the land from the Canadian Government, exactly as a private citizen might acquire a Canadian estate. Then he proposed to call the best business talent in Britain and Canada to his aid, and to establish a new chartered company to develop the area. Roads and railways would be built, townships laid out, water and electric power provided, just as in a scheme of private development. Unskilled jobs in the preliminary construction would be found at once for thousands of the unemployed in Britain, and in the meantime others would be put into training for farm and industrial work later. The new settlements would be not only agricultural, but also industrial, and whole industrial units would be transplanted bodily from Britain. Each British

district would contribute its quota of emigrants, and it was believed that, in a scheme which appealed so strongly to the imagination, so far from there being a disinclination to emigrate, there would be a brisk competition to get on the quota. He foreshadowed a new chartered company of adventurers, like the Hudson Bay and the East India Companies, and he hoped to have it run by able business men whose reputation would be pledged to its success. It would be financed by a twenty million loan, issued with a guarantee by the British Government, and Geraldine believed that a good deal of money would be forthcoming for the purpose from the Dominions and even from the United States.

This policy, preached in depressed areas with Geraldine's eloquence to audiences deep in the mire of unemployment, had a considerable success. Waldemar was, of course, in violent opposition. He harped on the iniquities and corruption of chartered companies in the past, and he ingeminated the word "inflation." Trant pooh-poohed the whole thing. You could not cure an ill, he said, by running away from it; he was a simple Englishman, who disliked a grandiose Imperialism run for the benefit of Jews. But the most serious disapproval was in Geraldine's own party—the "big business" group, who were afraid of the effect of such a loan on the markets. The younger Tories as a whole were enthusiastic, and, what was more significant, the Left Wing of Labour blessed it cordially. It was their own line of country, the kind of thing they had been pressing on their otiose leader. Trant's life was made a burden to

him by endless questions in the House from his own people, and Collinson, a young Labour member from the Midlands, declared that Geraldine was the best Socialist of them all, since he alone had the courage to use in an emergency the corporate power and intelligence of the State.

Mayot considered hard. The omens pointed to an alliance between Waldemar and the Tory Right Wing. But how was that possible? The anti-Geraldine Tories were to a man Protectionists, and Waldemar and his party would die in the last ditch for Free Trade. . . . What about a grouping of the Labour Left and the Tory Left? On the matter of ultimate principles, no doubt, there was a deep cleavage, for the most progressive young Tory would have nothing to do with Marxism. But after all, Marxism was becoming a very shadowy faith, and in practical politics it was easy to conceive Tory and Labour youth lining up. Both were natural Protectionists, and abominated Whiggism and all its ways. He noticed how in the House the two groups seemed to be friendly, and mingled constantly in the smoking-room. A volume of political essays had recently been published, to which Geraldine had written a preface, and the contributors included Collinson, Macleish, the Glasgow firebrand, and young Tories like Lord Lanyard and John Fortingall. . . . But no! It was impossible, he decided. For the leader of such a combination would be Geraldine, whereas, as he knew, in eight months Waldemar would be Prime Minister. Victory would not follow such banners, so he tried another cast.

At this point Sally Flambard took a hand. She

suddenly appeared as a political hostess, and I do not think that Mayot had anything to do with it. Her husband was of course a Tory of an antique school, but Sally had not hitherto shown any political interest. Now she discovered that she believed in constitutional government and the old ways, and profoundly distrusted both Labour and Geraldine. The move, I think, was only another phase of Sally's restless activity. She had had her finger in most pies, and wanted a new one. Also she had acquired a regard for Waldemar. Being a New Englander, she had in her bones an admiration for the type of statesman represented by the fathers of her country—large, grave, gnomish, rhetorical men—and Waldemar seemed to her to be a judicious compound of Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln.

Anyhow, she took to giving luncheon parties in Berkeley Square, at which much nonsense was spoken, especially by the hostess. You see, she misread Waldemar, and the initial mistake spoiled all her strategy. She thought that he was a natural leader and an original thinker, whereas he was primarily a mechanical instrument, discoursing—very beautifully no doubt—traditional music. She was convinced that she had only to bring him into touch with some of the solider Conservatives for them to feel that he was a dæmonic figure, a wedder of current realities to historic wisdom. So she got together some amazing gatherings of incompatibles. The materials, so far from being the essentials of good fare to be cooked by a skilful hand, were more like chemicals turned by their juxtaposition into explosives.

Mayot was to be the *trait d'union*, the adroit outsider, who could combine the ill-assorted guests, preparatory to Waldemar's treatment. I don't know where she got her notion of him—probably from himself. I attended two of the luncheons, and they gave me some idea of Mayot's game. The plan was to unite the Tory Right and Centre (*minus* Geraldine) with the Liberals through a common dislike of viewy extravagance and a common trust in Waldemar.

The result was high comedy. Waldemar, honest man, did his best. He tried to be civil to everybody in his pleasant old-fashioned way, but he had no single thing in common with nine out of ten of the Tories who sat at Sally's table. I could see Mayot trying to guide him into diplomatic paths, but Waldemar was far too hard-set a being to play a part, even if he had wished to. He talked books and the classics to Sir Penton Furbast, the Press magnate, who was more or less illiterate. He told stories of Gladstone, and expatiated on the glory that had died with him, to old Isaac Isaacson, whose life had been spent in a blind worship of Disraeli. Once he thought he had got hold of a batch of country gentlemen, and discoursed on a scheme he had for lightening the burdens on rural land by means of an ingenious tax on inflated stock-exchange values; but it was champagne, not country air, that gave them their high colour—all were noted market operators, and his talk scared them into fits. An impish fate seemed to brood over those luncheons. Waldemar talked disarmament to the chairman of the Navy League, and acidly criticised America to Wortley-Dodd,

who had an American mother and mother-in-law. His only success was with me, for I had always rather liked him, and could talk to him about birds and the inaccuracies of the Greville Memoirs. But the real rock on which the thing shipwrecked was Protection. Every one of Sally's Tories was an earnest Protectionist, and, at the last luncheon just before Christmas, Waldemar told Ashley Bridges that Protection meant four million unemployed and the dissolution of the Empire, and Bridges retorted in so many words that he was a fool.

Sally's parties were a most valuable experience for Mayot. He was progressing in his quest by the time-honoured method of trial and error. By this time he was perfectly clear on one point. No alliance was conceivable between Waldemar and the Tory rank-and-file, for a strong dislike of Trant and a growing suspicion of Geraldine would never surmount the tariff difficulty. So he turned to the only remaining combination which would suit his book—the Liberals and the Labour Right.

I should have said that hitherto Mayot had never identified himself with any group in his party. He had been of the Centre, a Labour man *sans phrase*; one who would be able, without any compromising past, to incline, when the occasion arose, to the Right or to the Left. But clearly this detachment would soon be impossible. If Waldemar was to form a Government, it could only be with the help of the Labour Right, for it was difficult to imagine Collinson and his like having anything to do with one whom they had repeatedly described in public as a fatted calf. If

he, Mayot, were to play a prominent part in that Government, it was therefore obligatory to get some hold on the section of his party which would support Waldemar. He must edge discreetly towards the Right Wing.

Discretion was essential, and secrecy. He could not afford as yet to break with the Left, and he must give no sign of disloyalty to Trant. He needed a confederate, and he found in old Folliot the man he wanted.

Folliot, as I have mentioned, was an elderly gossip, who had been a notable figure in the Edwardian era, but who since the War had become a bore. He appeared less regularly at smart dinner-parties, and fewer country houses were open to him. When I first came to London men drew near him, when the women had left the room, to hear his stories, and youth in the clubs made rather a cult of him. I remember congratulating myself on the privilege of being acquainted with one who had known all the great men in Europe for half a century. Now the poor old fellow was allowed to drink his port in lonely silence. He was a pathetic figure, and what chiefly grieved him was his exclusion from politics. He had never been anything of a serious politician, though he had twice sat for short terms in the House, but he had been a useful go-between. One of his virtues was that, though a notorious gossip, he could be trusted to be as secret as the grave in any business in which he was employed. He used never even to mention the things he had done—his negotiations as a young man with the Liberal Unionists, or his very useful work over the House of Lords

question in 1910—only grinned and looked wise when the topics came up. Folliot had his own point of honour.

Lately he had come to affect Labour out of disgust at the neglect of his own people. He did not love Trant, who laughed at him, but he had some vogue among the feudal aristocracy of the trade unions, who liked what they regarded as a link with historic British policy. Mayot easily enlisted him, for he was a gullible old gentleman, and was flattered at being consulted. He discovered that he had a mission to restore the two-party system by a union of all soberly progressive forces. He himself had begun life as a follower of Hartington, and so had never cared for the straiter sect of the Carlton Club, and had always had his doubts about Protection. He foresaw a chance of reviving that decorous Whiggism for which he had always hankered, based upon the two solidest things in Britain—the middle-class Liberal and the intelligent working man.

So during the early part of the new year he was happily busy. He gave a great many dinners, sometimes at his flat and sometimes at Brooks's, to which were bidden trade-union members of Parliament, one or two members of the Government who were supposed to be disaffected towards Trant, and a number of carefully selected Liberals. Waldemar came once or twice and Mayot was invariably present. These dinners seem to have gone off very well, and no hint of them leaked into the Press. It was a game which Mayot could play to perfection. He could see that already he was regarded with favour by the Liberal stalwarts, and

a certain type of Labour man was coming to look with a new respect upon one who could interpret his honest prejudices and give them an air of political profundity. By the end of January he was very well satisfied. He had decided that he had forecast correctly the process which would lead to Waldemar's premiership, and had put himself in a position to reap the full advantage of his foreknowledge. What he hoped for, I think, was the Exchequer.

3

But with February came one of the unlooked-for upheavals of opinion which make politics such a colossal gamble. The country suddenly awoke to the meaning of the unemployment figures. These were appalling, and, owing to the general dislocation of world credit and especially to the American situation, held out no immediate hope of improvement. The inevitable followed. Hitherto sedate newspapers began to shout, and the habitual shouters began to scream. Hunger-marchers thronged the highways to London; there were mass-meetings in every town in the North; the Archbishops appointed a day for public prayer; and what with deputations, appeals, and nagging questions in the House, the life of Trant became a burden.

The crisis produced a prophet, too. It is curious how throughout our history, whenever there is a strong movement from below, the names of the new leaders are usually queer monosyllables. It was so in Jack Cade's rebellion, and in Venner's business during the Commonwealth, and in the early days of the Labour movement; and now we

had the same phenomenon, as if the racial maelstrom at the foot of the ladder had thrown up remnants of a long-hidden world. The new prophet bore the incredible name of Chuff. From Tower Hill to Glasgow Green he stumped the land, declaring that our civilisation had broken down, that the crisis was graver than at the outbreak of the War, and demanding that the Government should act at once or admit their defeat. The remarkable thing about Chuff was that he was not an apostle of any single nostrum. He was a rather level-headed young man, who had once been a sailor, and he was content to bring home to the national conscience the magnitude of the tragedy ; the solution, he said, he left to cleverer people. He had real oratorical gifts, and what with Chuff on the platform and Collinson and his friends in the House, there was high confusion in domestic politics.

Opinion was oddly cross-divided, but presently it sorted itself out into two groups. The Activists demanded instant and drastic action, and the Passivists—the name was given them by their opponents and made prejudice owing to its resemblance to Pacifists ; they called themselves Constitutionalists—counselled patience, and went on steadily with local relief works, transference, the expediting of one or two big public utilities, and the other stock remedies. The Activists were a perfect Tower of Babel, all speaking different tongues. Some wanted an immediate application of Marxian Socialism. A big section, led by Collinson, had a fantastic scheme of developing the home markets by increased unemployment pay—a

sort of lifting up of oneself by the hair. Most accepted Geraldine's emigration policy; and a powerful wing advocated a stringent tariff with a view to making the Empire a self-contained economic unit. The agreed point, you might say, of all sections was direct and immediate action, a considerable degree of State Socialism, and a very general repudiation of Free Trade.

Activism, as I have said, cut clean across parties. Roughly its strength lay in the Labour Left and the Tory Left, and it was principally a back-bench movement, though Geraldine gave it a somewhat half-hearted blessing. Lord Lanyard and Collinson appeared on the same platforms in the country, and one powerful Tory paper supported the cause and sent special commissioners into the distressed areas to report. There was a debate on the Ministry of Labour estimates, in which the Labour Whips found themselves confronted with something very like a revolt. The Government was saved by the Liberals, but John Fortingall's motion was only lost by seven votes. This incident made the Passivists sit up and organise themselves. They had on their side Trant and the Labour Right and Centre, the whole of Waldemar's following, and the bulk of the Tories, Geraldine sitting delicately on the fence. But the debating ability—except for Waldemar and Mayot—was conspicuously with their opponents.

It was now that Mayot became something of a figure. The path was being prepared for a Labour-Liberal coalition with Waldemar as leader—though he could not quite realise how the latter event would come about. In such a combination, if it

took office, Trant might become Foreign Secretary, while he must make sure of the Exchequer. He made sure by hurling himself into the controversy with a vigour hitherto unknown in his career. He, who had always been a little detached and a good deal of a departmentalist, who had moreover been very respectful to his own extremists, now became a hard-hitting fanatic for moderation. He picked up some of Waldemar's apocalyptic mannerisms, and his parliamentary style acquired a full-throated ease. It shows how much the man was in earnest about his ambitions, that in a few weeks he should have forced himself to acquire a host of new arts. At that time I was so busy at the Bar that I was very little in the House, but, my sympathies being rather with the Activists, I had one or two brushes with Mayot. I found him a far more effective antagonist than before, for, though he was no better at argument, he could do what is usually more effective—denounce with apparent conviction.

Events in March played into his hands, for India suddenly boiled over, and the new constitution which we had laboriously established there seemed to be about to fail. There was a good deal of rioting, which had to be suppressed by force, and a number of patriots went to gaol. This split the Activist group asunder, for Collinson went out bald-headed against what he called the "fascist" policy of the Government, and most of the Labour Left followed him, while the young Tories took precisely the other line and shudderingly withdrew from their colleagues, like a prim virgin who opportunely discovers deeps of infamy in her lover.

Lanyard, indeed, who had humanitarian leanings, seized the occasion to become an Independent, and no longer received the party Whips, but John Fortingall and the others returned hastily to the fold. The Government handled the Indian situation with firmness, said its supporters—with cheap melodrama and blind brutality, said its critics—and it had behind it three-fourths of its own people, all the Liberals, and every Tory except Lanyard. Peace had revisited the tents of Israel.

Mayot in those days was a happy man, for the world was ordering itself exactly according to his wishes. The course of things was perfectly clear. Unemployment was the issue that blanketed all others, and unemployment had to all intents obliterated party lines. India had broken up the Activist phalanx. The advocacy of quack remedies was left to a few wild men. Geraldine's grandiose emigration dream had faded out of the air, and the Tories were back in their old Protectionist bog, in which he was confident that the bulk of the country would never join them. He thought that he had trained himself to look at facts with cold objective eyes, and such was his reading of them. The economic situation was very grim, and likely to become grimmer, and the solution must be some kind of national emergency Government in which Waldemar would take the lead, for he alone had the requisite prestige of character and was in the central tradition of British policy. Trant would be glad to be a lieutenant instead of a leader, and he himself, as the chief liaison officer between Liberal and Labour, would have his

choice of posts. His only anxiety concerned Flotter, now at the Exchequer. But Flotter was nearer the Left than himself, and farther from the Liberals, and could never command his purchase. Flotter was a dismal old man, whose reputation had been steadily decreasing, whereas in recent months he himself had added cubits to his political stature.

So Mayot began to talk discreetly in private about the National Government which facts were making imperative. I heard him airing his views one night at a dinner of Lady Altrincham's, and at a luncheon of Folliot's, where I sat next to him, he did me the honour to throw a fly over me. I asked him what his selections would be, and he replied that such a Government would have all responsible Labour to choose from, and all the Liberal talent.

"What about us?" I asked.

He looked wise. "That is harder, since Geraldine sticks to his Protection. But we should be glad to have some of you—on terms. You yourself, for instance."

"What puzzles me is, how you distinguish a National Government from a Coalition," I said. "Remember the word Coalition still stinks in the nostrils of most people."

"A Coalition," he said gravely, "only shares the loot, but a National Government pools the brains."

I grinned, and thanked him for the compliment.

4

Just before the Easter recess I lunched with Sally Flambard. Her craze for Waldemar had gone, she had never liked Geraldine, and, save for

Mayot, she had had very little to do with the Labour people. But now she had discovered Trant. She had been staying at a house in his own county, and he had come to dine, and she had at once conceived for him one of her sudden affections. There was a good deal of reason for that, for Trant was an extraordinarily attractive human being, whatever his defects might be as a statesman. Evelyn liked him too, though deploring his party label, for they were both sportsmen and practical farmers. The consequence was that Trant had become for the past month a frequent guest in Berkeley Square. It was a pleasant refuge for him, for he was not expected to talk politics, and he met for the most part people who did not know the alphabet of them.

Trant and I had always been good friends, and on that April Wednesday when we found ourselves side by side, I had from him—what I usually got—a jeremiad on the boredom and futility of his profession.

“I’m not like you,” he lamented. “You’ve got a body of exact knowledge behind you, and can contribute something important—legal advice, I mean. But here am I, an ordinary ill-informed citizen, set to deal with problems that no mortal man understands and no human ingenuity can solve. I spend my time clutching at imponderables.”

I said something to the effect that his modesty was his chief asset—that at least he knew what he did not know.

“Yes,” he went on, “but, hang it, Leithen, I’ve got to fight with fellows who are accursedly

cocksure, though they are cocksure about different things. Take that ass Waldemar . . .”

Trant proceeded to give an acid, and not unjust, analysis of Waldemar and the way he affected him. The two men were as antipathetic as a mongoose and a snake. He was far too loyal to crab any of his own side to an opponent, but I could see that he was nearly as sick of Collinson and his lot, and quite as sick of Mayot. In fact, it looked as if there was now no obvious place for Trant in his party, since he was at war with his own Left Wing, and Mayot had virtually taken over the leadership of the Right and Centre. At that time we were all talking about the alliance of Liberal and Labour, and this conversation convinced me that it would not include Trant.

Then he began to speak of ponderable things like fishing. He was off to a beat on the Wye, and lamented the bad reports of the run of fish. Just as we were leaving the table he said something that stuck in my memory. He asked me what was the best text of the Greek Anthology, attributing to me more scholarship than I possessed. . . . Now, Trant had always been bookish, and had a number of coy literary ambitions. I remembered that once, years before, he had confessed to me that, when he was quit of public life, he meant to amuse himself with a new translation of the Anthology. *Mel-eager*, I think, was his special favourite.

I walked down to the House that afternoon with one assured conviction. Trant was about to retire. His air had been that of a schoolboy who meant to defy authority and hang the consequences. He had the manner of one who knew he was going to

behave unconscientiously and dared anybody to prevent him. Also there was his Greek Anthology scheme.

By this time I had a pretty shrewd idea of Mayot's purpose. That afternoon I sat next to him in the tea-room and tried to sound him. He looked at me sharply.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked, and I told him "Not a word," but that the whole situation seemed to me fluid.

"Trant won't go till he has made certain of his successor," said Mayot. "And that won't be yet awhile."

But Trant did go, leaving the succession gloriously unsettled. A fortnight later the papers published a letter from him to Flotter, the chairman of his party. It was a dignified performance, and there was finality in every syllable. Trant said he had placed his resignation in His Majesty's hands and that it had been graciously accepted. He proposed to retire altogether from public life, and would not be a candidate at the next election. He made no complaints, but offered his most grateful thanks to his party for their unfailing loyalty in difficult times, and expressed his warm hopes for a brilliant future. . . . I had a line from him from the Spey, chiefly about fishing; but it ended with: "You did not think Master Silence a man of this mettle? Thank God it's over. Now I shall have peace to make my soul."

I ran across Mayot next day, and he was fairly walking on his toes with excitement. His face was prim with weighty secrets. "The Consuls must see to it that the Republic takes no hurt," he said

impressively. He was swollen with delicious responsibilities, and clearly believed that his hour had come.

The next event was the party meeting. Mayot was generally fancied as Trant's successor, but to everybody's surprise, Flotter, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was elected by nine votes. Flotter was of Mayot's persuasion ; but he was slightly nearer to the Left perhaps ; at any rate, he had not been so controversial a figure as Mayot, so he had the support of Collinson's merry men. Mayot did not seem to take the defeat much to heart, for he was looking well ahead. In a few weeks Waldemar would be Prime Minister, and he was the chief link between Waldemar and Labour.

I was, of course, not in the confidence of the Cabinet, and can only judge by results. But I fancy that the decision to ask for a dissolution must have been chiefly Mayot's. You see, he knew one fact which was hidden from all the world, and he had to consider how this fact was coming to birth. If Flotter took office at once he would not readily be induced to resign, though he was an old man, not very strong in body, and never credited with much ability. An election was desirable on every ground, for both the Labour and the Tory Parties were deeply divided, and the verdict of the polls would clear the air. Mayot had no doubt that the country was on the whole on the side of the kind of cautious progress represented by Waldemar and himself. The Tory Left had not been making much headway ; Collinson and his group were discredited because of their attitude on India ; and the appeal of the redoubtable Chuff had lost

its first freshness. His chief fear was Geraldine, whose tactical skill he profoundly respected. But an immediate election would spike Geraldine's guns, since he had no new policy to urge, and, if he improvised one, would not have time to elaborate it.

So Flotter was sent for by the King, and asked for a dissolution, which was granted. His Budget resolutions were hastily passed by a House whose interests were elsewhere, and in the second week of May the campaign began.

5

I have fought in my time seven elections, and can recollect a good many more, but I never knew one like this. My own seat was safe enough, and I was able to speak for our side up and down the land during the hottest May that I ever remember. But the whole thing was a nightmare, for in twenty-four hours all creeds and slogans were mixed up in a wild kaleidoscope. Very few candidates knew quite where they stood, and desperate must have been the confusion of the ordinary voter. Laboriously devised programmes became suddenly waste paper.

The supreme fact was that Waldemar went mad, or had a call, or saw a vision like Paul on the road to Damascus. You can take which explanation you choose. He had been lying low for some weeks, touring about the country and scarcely opening his mouth. He must have discovered the horrors of unemployment for himself, just as Geraldine had discovered them seven months before when he started his emigration scheme. Out of the

provinces came Waldemar, like Mahomet from the desert, to preach a new gospel.

It was a complete reversal of all that he and Mayot had stood for. He was still a Free Trader, he proclaimed, and would have nothing to do with a self-contained Empire, chiefly on the ground that it would be a barrier to that internationalism on which the future of humanity depended. But he was quite prepared to prohibit the import of certain rival commodities altogether as an emergency measure, and he had a great scheme for State purchase in bulk and the regulation of prices. He went farther. He, who had once moaned "inflation" when Geraldine's loan was proposed, was now a convert to a huge loan for emergency public works. Moreover, he swallowed wholesale most of Collinson's stuff about increasing our home power of consumption, and proposed measures which made the hair of the ordinary economist stand on end.

But it was not so much what Waldemar said as the way he said it. The old Activism was a stagnant pool compared to his furious torrent. He preached his heresies with the fire and conviction of an Israelitish prophet, and brought into the contest the larger spirit of an earlier age. He was quite frank about his conversion. He had had his eyes opened, and, like an honest man and a patriot, must follow the new light. It was the very violence of the revolution in his creed that made it so impressive. We had got into the habit of saying that the day of oratory was over, and that all that mattered was that a leader should be able to broadcast intelligibly. Waldemar disproved this in two

days. He was a great orator, and he swept over the North and the Midlands like a flame. Gladstone's Midlothian campaign was beaten hollow. He motored from town to town in a triumphal procession, and every gathering he addressed was like a revivalist meeting, half the audience in tears and the rest too solemnised to shout. Wild as his talk was, he brought hope to those who had none, and stirred up the political waters as they had not been moved since the War.

It was an awful position for everybody else. His own party, with a few exceptions, accepted him docilely, though they had some difficulty in accustoming themselves to the language. You see, the Liberals, having been long in the wilderness, were prepared to follow any Moses who would lead them across Jordan. There was a half-hearted attempt to make a deal about seats, so as to prevent unnecessary fights between Liberal and Labour, but it was a little too late for that, and we had the curious spectacle in many constituencies of official opponents saying precisely the same thing. Geraldine was in an awkward fix, for he had been a bit of an Activist and had his young entry to consider. He did the only thing possible—relapsed upon sobriety *plus* Protection, and did the best he could with tariffs and the Empire. But his form was badly cramped, and he had to face the unpleasing truth that he, the adroit tactician, had been tactically caught bending. His party, however, was well disciplined, and managed, more or less, to speak with one voice, though it was soon clear that many former Tory voters were being attracted by Waldemar.

The Labour people were in a worse hole. Flotter, who was very little use in an election, steered a wary course, welcoming some of Waldemar's ideas, but entering a *caveat* now and then to preserve his consistency. His programme was a feeble stammering affair, for he was about as much of a leader to his party as a baggage pony in a mountaineering expedition. It was Collinson who took charge. He ranged the Labour Left solidly under Waldemar's banner, and became Waldemar's most efficient henchman. In the whirlwind tour before the poll he never left his leader's side.

For the unhappy Mayot there was no place. Miracles do not happen in batches. What in the case of one man may be ascribed to the vouchsafement of divine light will in a second case be put down to policy. Mayot simply could not turn in his tracks. If he had, he would have become a public laughing-stock. His denunciation of Activism had been too wholehearted, his devotion to economic sanity too complete. So he did nothing. He never spoke outside his own constituency, where he was opposed by the formidable Chuff, who stood as a Labour Independent. I gather that he talked a lonely Waldemarism, which Waldemar himself was busily engaged in tearing to tatters.

I got the final results at a Perthshire inn. Mayot was badly beaten; a small thing in itself, for another seat would have been found for him if he had mattered anything to any party—which he did not. There had been the expected defection of Tory voters. The Liberals had done well at our expense owing to Waldemar's name, and all the

Labour Left were back with big majorities. So far as I remember, the figures were 251 Labour, 112 Liberals, 290 Tories, and 12 Independents. The country had approved a Coalition.

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I went down to stay with Trant for a week-end in the May-fly season. The new Cabinet had just been announced—Waldemar, Prime Minister; Collinson at the Ministry of Labour; Flotter back at the Exchequer; and Lord Lanyard at the Foreign Office.

Trant, in disreputable clothes, was soaking gut and tying on flies.

"There has been a good deal of trouble," he told me. "Our party didn't want Waldemar. They thought that the leader should come from them, and I gather that Waldemar would have been quite willing to stand down if there had been anybody else. But there wasn't. You couldn't put Flotter in charge.

"Poor old Mayot," he went on, his pleasant face puckered into a grin. "Politics are a brutal game, you know. Here is an able fellow who makes one mistake and finds himself on the scrap-heap. If he hadn't been so clever he would be at No. 10 to-day. . . . Of course he would. If he had even been like Flotter, and trimmed from sheer stupidity, he would have been Prime Minister. . . . I must say I rather respect him for backing his fancy so steadily. He was shrewd enough to spot the winner, but not the race it would win. Thank God, I never pretended to have any cleverness. . . ."

XLVIII: MR. REGINALD DAKER

"As when a Gryfon through the wilderness,
With wingéd course ore Hill or moarie Dale,
Pursues the Arimasgian."

JOHN MILTON, *Paradise Lost*.

I

I CAN tell this story out of the fullest knowledge, for Reggie Daker had long made it a habit to pour out to me his inmost mind. But he was such an inconsequent being that it was not always easy to follow the involutions of that mind. So if my narrative has ragged edges it is because of its principal figure, who had a genius for discontinuity.

He had read in that upper room at Flambard quite clearly an announcement of an expedition to Yucatan, of which he was a member, and which was alleged to have left England on June 9th the following year. Now, Reggie believed in Moe more implicitly than any of us, for one of his chief traits was a profound credulity. But he did not in the least believe in the announcement. Or rather let me put it that, while he was quite certain that the words he read would be in *The Times* a year hence, he was not less certain that they did not concern him. Nothing would induce him to go to Yucatan or any place of the kind. He did not trouble to consider how he was to square his belief in the accuracy of this piece of foreknowledge with his determination that it should not be true in fact. He only knew that he was not going to budge from England.

He did not know where Yucatan was, for he had the vagueness about geography which distinguishes

the products of our older public schools and universities, and he had not the curiosity to enquire. He fancied that it must be in the East ; places ending in " tan " were always in the East ; he remembered Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Gulistan. But, east or west, it mattered nothing to him. A man could not be hustled off abroad unless he wanted to, and nothing was farther from his inclinations.

Reggie was one of a type created by the post-War world. My nephew Charles, who was seven years his senior, and had been much battered by campaigning, said that it comforted him to look at Reggie, for it made him realise that the War chapter was really closed. His mother had died when he was a baby, and his father fell in the Yeomanry fight at Suvla, leaving him a small family property in the Midlands. A sudden industrial expansion made this property valuable, and in the boom year after peace his trustees sold it for a big sum, so that Reggie went to Oxford with a considerable income and no encumbrances. He was not distinguished at the University except for his power to amass friends. He had the family gift of horsemanship, and for a time showed extraordinary energy in riding in " grinds " and country steeplechases. Reggie, with his kit in a brown-paper parcel, might have been seen catching very early trains for remote places. But the craze passed, though his love of horses endured, and Reggie settled down to make a comfortable nest for himself in life.

His intellectual powers were nothing to boast of, but no man had a finer collection of interests. He

had a knack of savouring the quality of a variety of things, never going far below the surface, but getting the maximum of pleasure for the minimum of pains. He dabbled in everything—art, literature, field sports, society, even a little corner of philanthropy. He was modest, eager, enthusiastic, and as generous a soul as God ever made. Also he had a pretty talent for sheer farcical fun. The result was that he was widely popular, for in his innocent way he oxygenated the air around him. He had been a member of Pop at Eton, though he had no athletic or scholastic distinctions, and he went down from the University with a larger equipment of friends—not acquaintances merely, but friends—than any of his contemporaries.

He cast about for a job, for he had a conscience of a sort, but, as I have already mentioned, he was a difficult creature to fit into any niche. He was too mercurial, and after a week or two managed to tumble out. But all the time he had his own private profession. His purpose was to make an art of English life. The ritual of that life had been badly dislocated by the War, but enough remained to fascinate Reggie. He was in love with every detail of the ordered round which carried youth of his type from January to January. He adored London in all her moods—the snugness of her winters, new faces at dinner-parties, the constant meetings of friends, plays and books, glossy ponies and green turf at Roehampton, cricket matches and race meetings, the view over St. James's Park in May, Piccadilly in summer, Kensington Gardens in their October russet. Nor did he appreciate less the rural background to London's life—riverside.

lawns, a cutter on the Solent in a fresh breeze, smoky brown coverts in the December dusks, purple Scots twilights when the guns moved homeward from the high moors. Reggie was supremely content with the place where his lines had been cast. It seemed to him that, if he lived to the age of Methuselah, he could not exhaust England.

He had a pleasant little house near the Brompton Road, where an elderly couple looked after his wants. He belonged to two good clubs, one a young man's and the other an old man's—and enjoyed them both. He hunted regularly with the Saturday Bicester, had a rod on a dry-fly stream in Berkshire, went every year on a round of Scots visits, and, being an excellent shot, was a welcome guest at covert shoots. Indeed, Reggie was a welcome guest anywhere, for he had the gift of making whatever he did seem better worth doing to those who companioned him. His enthusiasm, which was never boring, put colour and light into other people's worlds. I have come down to breakfast before a day's partridge shooting, apathetic about the prospect, and have been compelled by Reggie to look forward to it with the ardour of a boy. Small wonder he was popular; many people remain young, but few can communicate youthfulness.

You must understand that he was no indiscriminating epicurean. Every day he was developing a more perfect technique of appreciation. It sounds a selfish and effeminate mode of spending one's time, and certainly there was nothing of the strenuous life about Reggie. He had no inclination to buffet opponents about the head and build up

the Empire. But he was so warm-hearted and friendly that people were very ready to condone a slight lack of virility, the more so as he had considerable repute as a bold man to hounds. For myself, though now and then he exasperated me, on the whole it did me good to contemplate anyone so secure and content.

Reggie was wise enough to see that he needed some string to unite his many interests and give some sort of continuity to his life. So he was on the look-out for a regular job, occasionally found one, and invariably lost it. Then he decided that his avocation lay in the sale of old books. He had always been rather bookish, and had picked up a good deal of general information on the subject. It fitted in perfectly with his other tastes and the general tenor of his existence. He took to frequenting sales, cultivated dealers and collectors, enlarged his American acquaintance, and on a country-house visit made a point of investigating the library.

So at the time of the Flambard Whitsuntide party he had started in a modest way as a dealer in old books, specialising in the English seventeenth century. He had had a few successes, and was full of hope. Here was a profession which in no way interfered with his rule of life, was entrancing in itself, and might repair the ravages which the revenue authorities were making in his private income.

He came to lunch with me in London in July, and I realised that the impression made by Moe was fast disappearing. "Terrible business," said Reggie. "I'm hanged if I quite know what happened, for,

looking back, I think we were all asleep. Oh, I read *The Times* all right. It said I had started off to a place called Yucatan with an expedition. Rotten idea ! ”

I asked him if he believed in the reality of his vision.

“ Of course,” he replied. “ I can’t explain how—no one can, except poor old Moe, and he’s dead—but I read the words in the paper as clearly as I am seeing you.”

“ You think they are true—will be true ? ”

“ I think that they will appear in *The Times* of June 10th next year. True in that sense. But not true in the sense that I shall have gone to Yucatan. Catch me doing anything so idiotic ! Forewarned, forearmed, you know.”

And Reggie plunged into an account of the pirated pre-first edition of the *Religio Medici*, of which he had heard of a copy.

2

So he went off to Scotland for the Twelfth, quite easy in his mind. He rarely thought about the Moe business, and, when he did, it was only to reflect with some amusement that in ten months’ time an eminent newspaper would be badly out in its facts. But he was thinking a great deal about Pamela Brune.

We have all our own Scotlands, and Reggie’s was not mine, so we never met north of the Tweed. He would have abhorred the rougher kind of deer forest, for he would never have got up the mountains, and he was no salmon fisherman. The kind of place he liked was a civilised country house where the comforts of life were not forgotten. He

was a neat shot at driven grouse, and loved a day on a mild moor where you motored to the first butts and had easy walks to the others. He liked good tennis and golf to be available on by-days, and he liked a large house-party with agreeable women. Reggie was the very opposite of the hard-bitten sportsman; sport was for him only one of the amenities of life, a condiment which should not be taken by itself, but which in combination gave flavour to the dish. So he selected his visits carefully, and was rarely disappointed.

This year he had an additional purpose; he went where he thought it likely that he might meet Pamela Brune. He believed himself to be very much in love, and he still had hopes; for in the last few weeks of the season Pamela had been a little kinder. She had been rather gentle and abstracted, and he hoped that her heart might be softening towards him.

He did not meet Pamela Brune, for reasons which I shall have to record elsewhere. But he had a very pleasant two months in comfortable dwellings, varied with a week in a yacht among the Western Isles. It was a fine autumn in the north, and Reggie returned with a full sketch-book—he dabbled in water-colours—and a stock of new enthusiasms. He had picked up a lot of folk-lore in the Hebrides, had written a good deal of indifferent verse in Pamela's honour, had conceived a scheme for the making of rugs with Celtic designs coloured by the native Highland dyes, and had learned something about early Scottish books—David Lyndesay and the like—on which he hoped to specialise for the American market. He meant

to develop these lines in the pleasant London winter to which he was looking forward.

Only one visit had been a failure. He had known Lamancha for some years as a notable connoisseur of pictures, and he had gladly accepted an invitation to Leriot. But Lamancha in Scotland was a very different person from Lamancha in London. Reggie found a party of men only, and with none of them, not even his host, did he appear to have much in common. They shot all day on the famous Leriot moors, and there he acquitted himself reasonably well, though he found the standard higher than elsewhere. But it was the evenings that proved out of joint. Eight sleepy men gossiped in the smoking-room till they stumbled to bed, and the talk was of two things only. All except Reggie had served in the War, and half the evenings were spent in campaign reminiscences which bored him profoundly. "Worse than golf shop," he complained to me. But the conversation of the other half scared him, for it was all about adventures in outlandish parts of the globe. It seemed that everyone but himself had sojourned in the oddest places. There was Maffit who had solved the riddle of the Bramaputra gorges, and Beavan who had been the first to penetrate the interior of New Guinea and climb Carstensz, and Wilmer who had been with the second Everest expedition, and Hurrell who had pursued his hobby of birds to the frozen tundras of the Yenesei. Apparently they were not garrulous, but they spoke of their doings with a quiet passion which frightened Reggie. They were all men of some distinction in English life, but they

talked as if what they were now doing was the merest triviality, and the real world for them lay across the seas. Even Lamancha, who was supposed to have the ball at his feet in politics, confessed that he would give up everything for the chances of being the first man to cross the great desert of southern Arabia.

To me later Reggie waxed eloquent on his discomfort.

"You never saw such a set of toughs," he said. "Real hearties."

I grinned at the word, and pointed out that "heartly" scarcely described the manner of Lamancha or Hurrell or Beavan.

"Oh, I don't mean that they were the cheery, back-slapping type of lad. Their style was more like frozen shell-fish. But they were all the lean, hard-bitten, Empire-building breed. To listen to them you would think it was a kind of disgrace to enjoy life at home as long as there was some filthy place abroad where they could get malaria and risk their necks. They made me feel an abject worm. . . . And, hang it all, you know, they began to infect me with their beastly restlessness. I was almost coming to believe that I was a cumberer of the ground, and should take up the white man's burden or do something silly. They were such cocksure pagans—never troubled to defend their views, but took it for granted that everybody but a hermaphrodite must share them."

There had been one exception, a middle-aged man called Tallis, who had a place in Wales. He was an antiquary of sorts, and appeared in his time to have done his bit of globe-trotting, but he

was now settled at home, and had inherited a fine library about which he was willing to talk. But the rest had been repellent, and what scared Reggie was that they had not been repellent enough. He had been attracted against his will ; he had felt himself being slowly drawn into an atmosphere utterly at variance with all his tastes. He uneasily remembered Flambard. These men were mostly Oriental travellers, and somewhere in the East lay Yucatan. . . . Reggie cut short his visit to Leriôt, and fled for safety to town.

There he found what seemed to be complete sanctuary, and presently the memory of Leriôt and its outlanders grew dim. He lapped himself in urban peace. By Christmas he had realised that Pamela Brune was not for him, and, being a philosophic soul, accepted the fact with resignation. He found many consolations in his life. The economic troubles which hit most people did not greatly affect a *rentier* like Reggie, whose modest but sufficient investments were widely and wisely distributed. He had enough exercise and fresh air to keep him fit—regular golf, an occasional day with the Bicester and an occasional covert shoot, and he took care that the company he kept was very different from that of Leriôt. The people he met on his shooting visits were mostly from the City, and their one aim was to recover a lost stability. The older men talked with longing of the comfortable Edwardian days, and Reggie wholeheartedly shared their regrets. All the world he mixed with seemed to be converted to his own view of life. Lamancha, making speeches in the

House and presiding at public dinners, was very unlike the savage who at Leriot had sighed for the Arabian desert. Even Hurrell, whom he saw occasionally in one of his clubs, was a respectable black-coated figure, more concerned with a paper he was to read to the Royal Society than with the Siberian tundras.

Reggie had rarely spent more agreeable months. During November and December there was a good deal of frost, and London had never seemed at once so tonic and so cosy. Being a good-hearted fellow he did a little mild philanthropy, and sat on a committee which took care of several distressed mining villages, besides putting in one evening a week at his boys' club. For the rest he had his pleasant little dinners of selected friends, his club luncheons, his researches at the Museum, his plays and picture shows, and his steadily growing bibliophilic fervour. And behind everything he did was the delicious background of London, which linked up the centuries and made even the new and the raw seem long-descended—an atmosphere which at once soothed and stimulated—the last perfection of man's handiwork—the true setting for a civilised life.

He made real progress, too, with his book-selling, and it looked as if he had found at last the thing he could do well. It was the kind of subject which Reggie could cope with, for he had an excellent memory, and, when his interest was actively engaged, a real power of absorbing knowledge. Also the times suited him, for there was a slump in everything but books. Pictures, furniture, houses, land—there were plenty of sellers

and few buyers ; but in books the demand kept level with the supply. Hard-up country gentry put their libraries into the market, and it was often possible to buy these privately at modest prices. Reggie had several such lucky speculations, and found that often half a dozen volumes returned him his outlay with a handsome profit.

3

Then in January a small thing happened which had momentous consequences.

He picked up a cheap lot of books at a sale in the Midlands, and one of these was a copy of a little-known political poem of Thomas Gray, called, I think, *The Candidate*. It was printed in the familiar Caslon type of the Strawberry Hill press, and it had on the fly-leaf a long inscription to a certain Theophilus Tallis, in which comment was made on the poet and his work. The inscription was signed "H. W.," and on the inside of the cover was the armorial bookplate of Tallis of Libanus Hall. If this inscription were genuine, here was an "association" book of a high order. Reggie compared it with many specimens of Horace Walpole's handwriting, with the general style of which it seemed to agree. Could he establish the identity of Theophilus Tallis, and ascertain that he had been a friend of Walpole's, the authenticity would be complete. . . . Then he remembered the man he had met at Leriot. His name was Tallis, and he had a place on the Welsh border. Reggie had scribbled down his club address, so he wrote to him there and asked him for information. In a day or two, a reply came from Libanus Hall.

The Theophilus in question was his great-grandfather, said the writer, and doubtless the book had strayed from his library. Such things often happened—an undergraduate would carry off a volume to Oxford and forget about it, or a guest would borrow and fail to return. The old Theophilus had left many papers which had never been examined, but in which the connection with Walpole could no doubt be traced. Let Reggie pay him a visit, for there were many things in his library to interest him.

So in the last week of January Reggie departed for the Welsh marches. The association of Tallis with Leriôt gave him no anxiety, for recently he had been so lapped in urban life that he had forgotten about Leriôt and its uneasy guests, and in any case Tallis had been different from the others. Tallis had not looked like them, for he was a man of a comfortable habit of body, with a round, high-coloured face—a hunting squire with a dash of the *bon vivant*. Reggie remembered with satisfaction how he had criticised Lamancha's port. It was true that he seemed to have travelled much, but his wandering years were over. He had merely hinted at his doings abroad, but he had spoken at length and with gusto about his collections and his library.

Libanus proved to be a dwelling after Reggie's heart, a Tudor manor-house, built round a border keep, according to the fashion of the Welsh marches. It stood on a shelf in a shallow river valley, backed with low, scrub-clad hills, and behind them were wide, rolling moorlands. It was a bachelor establishment, very well run, and Tallis

was the perfect host. The collections did not interest Reggie—stone plaques, and queerly marked tiles, and uncouth stone heads which suggested a more primitive Epstein. He took them for Assyrian, and when Tallis called them “Mayan” the word conveyed nothing to him. But the library far surpassed his hopes. It had been founded in the seventeenth century, when Wales was full of lettered squires, by a certain John Tallis, who had obligingly kept a notebook in which he recorded his purchases and the prices he paid for them. It was especially rich in authors with a Welsh connection, like Henry Vaughan and the Herberts, but there was a fine set of Donne, two of the Shakespeare folios, and many of the Cavalier lyrists, besides a quantity of devotional and political *rariora*. The other collector in the family had been Theophilus Tallis in the reign of George III. He had specialised in illustrated books, mostly French, but he had also added to the shelves some notable *incunabula*, for he lived into the day of the Roxburghe and Heber libraries. Reggie hunted up Theophilus in the family archives and found that he had been a friend of Gray and a frequent correspondent of Horace Walpole. There were batches of letters from both, which had never been published.

Tallis was also a master of foxhounds, a mountainy pack, with some of the old shaggy Welsh strain in them, which hunted about a hundred square miles of wild country at the back of Libanus. The river valley was pockety and swampy, but the short bent of the moors made splendid going. Reggie was well mounted by his host, it was soft,

grey weather in which scent lay well, and he had several glorious days up on the roof of things. "You never saw such a place," he wrote to me. "Nothing much to lep, but you must ride cunning, as on Exmoor, if you want to keep up with hounds. I couldn't keep my eye on them for the scenery. One was on a great boss, with a hint far away of deeper valleys, and with lumps of blue mountain poking up on the horizon—foreshortened, you know, like ships coming into sight at sea. It fairly went to my head. Then the hunt was pure Sir Roger de Coverley—hard-riding farmers and squires that had never stirred from their paternal acres. I felt as if I had slipped through a chink of time into an elder England."

Reggie enjoyed every moment, for it was the precise ritual in which his fancy delighted. He and Tallis would get home in the twilight, and have poached eggs and tea by the library fire. Then would come a blessed time in slippers with a book or a newspaper; then a bath and dinner; and after that a leisurely ranging among the shelves and pleasant sleepy armchair talk. Tallis was an ideal host in other ways than as a provider of good sport, good quarters and good fare. He never obtruded his own interests, never turned the talk to the stone monstrosities in the hall which he had given half his life to collect, or expounded the meaning of "Mayan." With Reggie he was the bibliophile and the rural squire, prepared to agree with him most cordially when he proclaimed that there was no place on earth like his own land and wondered why anyone was foolish enough to leave it.

"Fate," said Tallis. "Something switches you abroad before you know where you are. I've always started unwillingly, but there has never been any alternative if I wanted to get a thing done."

Reggie shook his head, implying that he would prefer the thing to remain undone.

He was in this mood of comfort, sentimentality and complacency when Verona Cortal came to dine. Tallis was apologetic. "The Reeces at Bryncoch have a niece staying with them—she comes every year for a week or two's hunting—and I always give Jim Jack a hand to entertain her. She's rather a pleasant child, and deserves something nearer her age than an old buffer like me. I hope you don't mind. She's pretty knowledgeable about books, you know—been to college and that sort of thing." So the following evening Reggie found himself seated at dinner next to an attractive young woman with whom he had no difficulty in conversing. Miss Cortal was of the marmoreal blonde type, with a smooth white skin and a wealth of unshingled fair hair. Her eyes were blue, not the pale lymphatic kind, but a vivacious masterful blue. She was beautifully turned out, polished to a high degree, and to the last degree composed and confident. Reggie did not think her pretty; she was a trifle too substantial for one who was still under the spell of Pamela Brune's woodland grace; but he found her an entrancing companion.

For she seemed to share his every taste and prejudice. They talked of the countryside, for which she had a lively enthusiasm. Her own

home was in Gloucestershire, to which her people had moved from the West Riding, where they had been local bankers till they amalgamated with one of the London banks. Her father was dead, but her brothers were in business in London, and she lived partly with them and partly with her mother in the country. Reggie had never met anyone, certainly no woman, who seemed to savour so intelligently the manifold delights of English life, as he understood them. Pamela had been blank and derisory when he tried to talk of such things, but this girl seemed instinctively to penetrate his moods and to give his imponderables a clean-cut reality. It was flattering to be so fully comprehended. They talked of books, and it appeared that she had taken a degree in history at Oxford, and was making a study of the Roman remains in Cotswold. They discovered that they had friends in common, about whose merits and demerits they agreed; and presently in a corner of the shabby drawing-room, while her aunt dozed and Jim Jack and Tallis were deep in hounds, they advanced to the intimacy which comes to those who unexpectedly find themselves at one in their private prepossessions. Reggie saw the Bryncoch car depart with the conviction that he had never before met quite so companionable a being.

It only needed some little thing to set Verona in a romantic light, and that something befell next day. The soft grey weather broke up into one of those clear, late-winter afternoons which are a fore-taste of spring. The hounds, after various false starts in the morning, had run right to the top of the moorlands, and killed near the standing stones

called the Three Brothers. Verona's mare got an overreach in a bog, and she and Reggie were left behind to make their way home alone in the gathering dusk. The girl looked well on horseback, and the excitement of the day and the winds of the moor had given her a wild-rose colour and abated the trimness of her get-up. As they jogged home Reggie wondered that he had not thought her pretty before; the polished young lady had gone, and in its place was something very girlish and young, something more primitive and more feminine. They rode slowly under a sky of lemon and amethyst, and stopped to watch the sunset flaming over the remote western hills, or to look east to where the shadows were creeping over the great hollow which was England. Then they descended by green drove-roads to the valley woods, and saw the lights' twinkle, miles apart, of their respective homes. It was dark now, and Reggie had to help with the limping mare in some of the dingles. On one such occasion she laid a light hand on his arm.

"What a day!" she said, in a rapt whisper. "This is what I love best—to come out of the wilds into ancient, habitable peace. You can only do it in England. What a land! Who was it called it 'Merlin's Isle of Gramarye?'"

"What a girl!" thought Reggie. "She knows what I want to think before I have thought it."

Two days later he went to Bryncoch to luncheon. Verona was delightful. At Libanus she had been the accomplished woman of the world; on the moors she had been touched with romance; but

here she was a child, eager to show her playthings to another child. She dragged him through the library, and out of a wilderness of forestry journals and reports of agricultural societies unearthed volumes worthy of a bibliophile's eye. She acted showman to the architectural curiosities of the house, and after luncheon led him to the old-fashioned walled garden. "They used to be able," she told him, "to grow all kinds of hothouse fruits here out of doors. Do you know why?" She pointed out the flues which ran from a furnace at each corner through the immense brick walls. "That is how they beat the frost and the east winds. They kept the walls all winter at an even temperature. They could do it a hundred years ago, when coal cost little more than the price of carting it from the pit-heads over the hills."

"I love all these relics," she said with the prettiest sentiment. "I want the memory of them to survive. We should keep the past next door to us in our lives and be always looking back to it."

Reggie warmly approved, for it was his own philosophy. But he was a little surprised when she embarked on a most business-like discussion as to the price of coal, and what it would cost to do the same thing to-day. She quoted figures like an accountant. He was spurred to tell her of his own work, of his book-selling schemes, the successes he had had and his plans for the future. She listened eagerly and made what seemed to him some acute suggestions.

He went back to London next day with his mind in a pleasant confusion. He did not think that he was in love with Miss Cortal, but he

decided that in her he had found a most congenial comrade. To have discovered someone so like-minded, so able to justify the faith they shared, gave him a welcome sense of security. Whatever was in store for him he had now a puissant ally.

4

I do not want to give the impression that Reggie was a vapid, sentimental young man. He was very much the other way. He had plenty of shrewdness, and had all the reticences of his kind. No virginity was ever more fastidiously guarded than the sacred places of the English male in youth. He will perish sooner than confess the things nearest to his heart. If anyone had told Reggie in his presence that he was an artist in life, a connoisseur of evasive sensations, the charge would have been hotly denied. He believed himself to be a normal person, who rejoiced in running with the pack. I guessed his creed, but it was only from casual unguarded phrases and his manner of life, never from his own confession. He would have blushed to say the things which Verona was always saying. But in her mouth they delighted him, for she put into words what he was incapable of expressing himself—incapable partly from shamefacedness and partly from simple lack of the gift for definition. She was magnificently explicit, and carried it off. I have been told that, when you can adequately formulate a grief, you have removed half the sting of it, and I fancy that in the case of the pleasing emotions the same explication doubles the pleasure. That is the virtue of the poets, since they do for the ordinary man what he

cannot do for himself. Verona was Reggie's bard. She gave a local habitation and a name to his airy nothings, and in so doing she confirmed him in his faith. He felt that the things he cared for were given a new stability when she became their most competent prophet.

They had arranged to meet in London, and next week he dined at the Cortals' large, dull house in Eaton Square. I happened to be a guest, for my nephew Charles was connected with the Cortals in business, and I had been their counsel in a complicated House of Lords appeal. It was the first occasion on which I met the daughter of the house.

It was a big dinner-party, representative of the family's many interests, and starred with celebrities, none of whom were quite of the first order, except Geraldine, the Tory leader. There was a corps commander in the late War, who had taken up politics and hankered after a British variant of Fascism; Lord Lavan, who had governed some Dominion; a Royal Academician, who painted mystical topical allegories, a sort of blend of Blake and Frith; a director of the Bank of England; Smithers, the Cambridge economist; one or two city magnates; Claypole, the buxom novelist, whom his admirers regarded as an English Balzac; a Cotswold master of hounds up in London to visit his dentist; nothing young except Reggie.

The dinner was the elaborate affair which used to be in fashion when I first came to London—two dishes in every course, and the old-fashioned succession of wines instead of the monotonous champagne of to-day. Mrs. Cortal sat beaming at her end of the table, with the blank amiability of

the stone deaf, and the duties of hostess fell upon her daughter. I did not then realise her power over Reggie, but I watched her with admiration. She sat between Geraldine and Claypole, and she kept a big section of the table going. Her manner was a gentle alertness, quick to catch the ball of talk and return it, but never for one moment asserting itself. She had a pleasant trick of turning to a speaker with bright eyes and slightly raised brows, a trick which was an invitation to confidences. Being opposite her, I had a chance on such occasions of observing her face in profile, and it struck me that when she grew older she would have a look of Queen Victoria—the same ripeness and authority. Her performance was extraordinarily efficient, for she managed to make her neighbours talk as freely as if it had been a *tête-à-tête*, and at the same time broadcast the results to a considerable part of the company. Claypole's bubbling utterances were clarified by her into good conversation, and used as baits to entice Geraldine. The novelist's pose was that of a detached observer of life, a kindly and half-contemptuous critic of the ordinary struggle for success, whereas Geraldine was frankly an adept at the game, who made no concealment of his devotion to it. Claypole's mild cynicism, as interpreted by Verona, was just the thing to rouse the latter, who was adroitly led into spirited confessions of faith. There is no talker to compare with Geraldine when he is stirred, with his Irish humour, his dazzling overstatements, and his occasional flights into serious passion, and I have rarely heard him better than under Verona's stimulus. Claypole was flattered,

for he was not in the habit of consorting with ex-Prime Ministers ; the others were flattered, for they seemed to be privileged to share a great man's confidences. I saw Reggie's eyes fixed on the girl in respectful wonder.

When the women rose I had a talk with one of her brothers. There were two of them, very much alike except that one was fair and one was dark ; both were clean shaven, and both wore eyeglasses. One was a director of the bank which had absorbed the family business, and the other was a partner in a well-known financial house. It was the latter who took the chair beside me, and presently I found myself able to place the Cortal family. The brothers belonged to the type which in my irreverent youth we called the " blood stockbroker "—the people who wanted to be gentlefolk first and city men afterwards, but were determined to be a complete success in both rôles. They had been to the best public school and the most fashionable college, and had acquired a manner blended of the guardsman, the country squire and the man of affairs. Young Mr. Michael talked hunting to me and the prospects of the National, touched upon spring salmon and his last year's experience in Scotland, and told an excellent story which he had heard that afternoon in White's ; but he also said some shrewd things about politics, and when I asked him a question about certain rumours in the City I got a crisp and well-informed reply. The Cortals were assuredly a competent family, though I decided that there was most quality in the girl. There had been something Napoleonic in that graceful profile which I had studied during dinner.

Afterwards in the drawing-room I saw Verona and Reggie in a corner. They were smiling on each other like old friends, and she was saying something to him with an affectionate, almost maternal air. I had decided that she would make an excellent wife for an ambitious politician, but now I began to wonder if she were not the wife for Reggie. Far more suitable than Pamela Brune, whose rarity and subtlety required a different kind of mate. Reggie needed somebody to form him and run him, somebody who would put order into the attractive chaos of his life. Those firm white hands of hers might do much with such plastic stuff.

That dinner was followed by many meetings between the two. Verona dined with him in his little house, they went to the play together, she mounted him with her own pack, the Mivern, and they had several days with the Bicester. The first dinner in Eaton Square was soon succeeded by another, this time a family party—the four Cortals, a maiden aunt, a married uncle and several cousins. Reggie was the only stranger, and he was there as an adopted member of the clan, Verona's chosen friend. Not a suitor but a friend. There was as yet no suggestion of love-making. It was one of these new-fangled, cold-blooded companionships between the sexes.

But at this dinner it was apparent that the Cortal family had taken up Reggie seriously. He had already expounded his book-selling ambitions to Verona, as the kind of activity which made an appropriate background for the life he desired, and she had approved. Now it appeared that the whole

family knew of it, and were acutely interested. There was a good opportunity, said the uncle—his name was Shenstone, and he was a member of a shipping firm which had done well during the War—for men like Reggie, who had the entry to many corners of English society, to establish himself as an honest broker between those who had, and wished to sell, and those who had not, and wished to buy. At present, he said, both sides went to the big dealers, and there was no human touch, but the human touch was needed in what should be more than a matter of cold business.

“Take pictures,” said Mr. Shenstone, who was a connoisseur. “I see very little fun in picking up what I want at a big sale at Christie’s. What I like is to run something to earth in some odd corner of England, and get it by friendly negotiation. When I look at it on my walls, I remember the story behind it as well as its artistic merits. It stands for an episode in my life, like a stag’s head which recalls a good stalk. I must say I am always grateful to anyone who puts me in the way of this sporting interest in collecting.”

The others agreed. Mr. Algernon, the elder brother, expanded the theme. “Reggie,” he declared (they had very soon got on to Christian name terms), “can be the link between supply and demand, and a benefactor to both sides. He might be a sort of English Rosenbach. In every shire there are families who just manage to keep going. They have family possessions which they are far too proud to send to a sale, except in the very last resort. But very often they would

gladly sell a picture or a book privately, if they knew how to do it, and such a sale might make all the difference to their comfort."

The maiden aunt assented, and told how a family of her acquaintance in Shropshire had been saved from penury by a discovery in a garret, through the medium of a visiting Cambridge don, of three Shakespeare quartos. One of the cousins recounted a similar event in Westmorland.

"Money is tight, no doubt," continued Mr. Algernon, "but there's more of it about than people imagine. Fortunes are made on a falling as well as on a rising market. And people who have it do not know how to invest it. Industrials are too precarious, Government stocks have lost caste, and, since every part of the globe is under the weather, there is not the old attraction about foreign securities. I believe that there will be a growing tendency for people who have an ample margin of income to do what the Germans did when the mark was tumbling, and buy objects of art. But it must be something which is going to increase in value. Now, the fashion in pictures fluctuates, but not in books. There are only, say, twenty copies of an old book known to exist, and the numbers cannot be added to. An association book—say one which Walter Scott presented to Wordsworth with an autograph inscription—can never be duplicated. These things are better than bank-notes—they are solid bullion. The Americans have recognised this. A new millionaire in the States, as soon as he has made his pile, starts to found a library, though he may be scarcely literate. He knows what is certain to appreciate.

He remembers the Huth and the Britwell sales."

"And think of the charm of the business!" said Verona. "You are dealing in spiritual as well as in commercial values. And the cleanness of it!"

"But it needs careful handling," said Mr. Shenstone. "You cannot depend upon yourself, Mr. Daker. You must get a staff together, and lay down your lines carefully, for what you want is an intelligence department and a scientifically arranged clearing-house. You have to organise the buying side, and know just where to lay your hands on what you want. And you have to organise your customers—to get into touch with the people on both sides of the Atlantic who are hungering for your services. Your watchword must be organisation."

"Rationalisation," said Mr. Michael with a pleasant smile. "You must be in the fashion, my dear Reggie."

Reggie was flattered that his ideas should be taken so seriously by such a company, for he had the reverence for the business man which is often an obsession with the unbusinesslike. He was excited, too. He saw himself becoming a figure, a power, a man of wealth, all that he had ruled out as beyond his compass—and this without sacrifice of the things he loved. . . . But, as he caught Verona's beaming eyes, he had far down in his heart a little spasm of fear. For he seemed to see in them a hint of fetters.

5

The transformation of Reggie into a business man was begun at once, and it was Verona who took charge of it. Politics at the moment were

exciting, and in order to attend critical divisions I had to dine more than I liked at the House. The result was a number of improvised dinner-parties there, and at one of them I found Verona. No doubt Reggie had talked to her about me, so she treated me as if I were his elder brother, I thought her attractive, but I am bound to say a little formidable also, for I have rarely met any woman who knew her own mind so clearly.

The first thing to do was to get Reggie to organise his life. "You cannot achieve anything," she said sagely, "unless you make a plan." It was idle to think of running a business from the house in Brompton, so she had induced him to take an office—a pleasant little set of rooms which were fortunately vacant in the Adelphi neighbourhood. She had got him a secretary, a girl who had been at college with her, and she had started a system of card indexes, on which she dwelt lovingly. There was one for books, another for possible buyers, and a third for his acquaintances. She made a great point about codifying, so to speak, Reggie's immense acquaintance, for it was his chief asset in the business. Properly managed, it should give him access to quarters into which no dealer could penetrate. She nodded her head, and emphasised her points by tapping her right-hand fingers on her left-hand palm, exactly like a pretty schoolmistress. And several times she said "we," not "he," when she mentioned the undertaking.

She thought that he had better limit its scope. *Incunabula* and missals and such-like might be put aside as too ambitious. He should specialise on his old love, the seventeenth century, with

excursions into the eighteenth and early nineteenth. There was already a vigorous interest in the Augustans, and she predicted a revival in the post-Romantics and the Victorians. Above all, he should specialise in "association books" and manuscripts, which were the kind of thing to which he was likely to have access. More was needed than an intelligence bureau: they wanted a research department to verify *provenances*. There would have to be a good deal of work in the Museum, and for this she could enrol several young women who had been with her at Oxford. She was compiling a list of experts in special branches, university dons and so forth, to whom they could turn in special cases for advice. . . . Also they must make friends with the dealers, for it was no use antagonising the professionals: they could work in with them up to a point, and put little things in their way. Reggie knew a good many, and they were having some carefully selected luncheon-parties to extend his acquaintance. As for buyers, her brothers could help, for, being in the City, they knew where money was. Especially with America, she thought; both Algernon and Michael had a great deal of American business passing through their hands, and were frequently in New York. The American rich, she said, were an easier proposition than the English, for they talked freely of their hobbies instead of hiding them away like a secret vice.

I confess that I was enormously impressed by the girl's precision and good sense, and I was still more impressed when a few days later I ran across Reggie in the Athenæum, a club which he had

taken to frequenting. She had made a new man of him, a man with a purpose, tightened up and endowed with a high velocity. His eagerness had always been his chief charm, but now, instead of being diffused through the atmosphere, it seemed to have been canalised and given direction. "I'm one of the world's workers," he announced. "Office hours ten to five, and longer if required. I hop about the country, too, like a bagman. I never knew that a steady grind was such fun."

"How is your colleague?" I asked.

"Marvellous!" It was his favourite adjective. "By Jove, what a head she has! Already she has forgotten more about my job than I ever knew!"

"What do you call yourself?"

"Ah, that's a puzzler. We must have a little private company, of course. We rather thought of 'The Interpreter's House.' Bunyan, you know. You see the idea—the place where things are explained to people and people are explained to themselves. It was Verona's notion. Jolly good, I think."

It seemed an ambitious name for a dealer in old books, but it was not for me to damp Reggie's ardour. I could only rejoice that someone had managed to break him to harness, a task in which his friends had hitherto conspicuously failed. I met him occasionally in the company of the Cortal brothers, and I fancied that these glossy young men had something of the air of horsebreakers. They peered at the world through their glasses with a friendly proprietary air, and clearly regarded Reggie as their property. I was never

quite at ease in their presence, for their efficiency was a little too naked; they were too manifestly well equipped, too elaborately men of the world. But Reggie was fascinated. He, whose clothes had never been his strong point, was now trim and natty, and wore, like them, the ordinary city regimentals.

I asked my nephew Charles what he thought of the brothers, and he laughed. "The shiny Cortals!" he replied. "Good enough chaps in their way, I believe. Quite a high reputation in their own line. Can't say I care much for them myself. Their minds are too dashed relevant, if you know what I mean. No margin to them—no jolly waste—everything tidied up and put to its best use. I should think more of them if now and then they condescended to make a bloomer. Their gentility is a little too self-conscious, too. Oh, and of course they haven't a scrap of humour—not what you and I would call humour."

One night I dined with one of the livery companies, and sat next to the uncle, Shenstone, who was prime warden. Under the influence of some wonderful Madeira he became talkative, and I realised that the harness laid upon Reggie's back was going to be something more than a business set. For Shenstone spoke of him as if he were a member of the family, with just that touch of affectionate candour with which one speaks of a promising but still problematical relative. "Dear old Reggie," said the uncle. "Best of good fellows and full of stuff, you know. Slackly brought up, and needs to learn business habits, but improving every day." I forbore to mention Verona's name,

for I feared confidences. But I understood that Reggie was no more the unattached spectator of life ; he had been gathered into the fold of a tightly knit and most competent clan.

Just before I went abroad for Easter I dined again in Verona's company, and had the privilege of a long and intimate talk. I learned why the name of " Interpreter's House " had been selected. Verona had visions which soared far beyond the brokerage of old books. She wanted to make the firm a purveyor of English traditions, a discreet merchant of English charm. It would guide strangers of leisure into paths where they could savour fully the magic of an ancient society. It would provide seekers with a background which, unless they were born to it, they could never find. It would be a clearing-house for delicate and subtle and indefinable things. It would reveal and interpret the sacred places of our long history. In a word, it would " rationalise " and make available to the public the antique glamour of these islands.

It all sounds preposterous, but there was nothing preposterous about her exposition. She had a trick, when excited, of half-closing her lids, which softened the rather hard vitality of her eyes, and at such times she lost her usual briskness and was almost wistful. " *You* must understand what I mean. We are all agreed that England is Merlin's Isle of Gramarye." (I quote her exact words.) " But to how many is that more than a phrase ? It is so hard to get behind the veil of our noisy modernism to the lovely and enduring truth. You know how sensitive Reggie is to such things. Well,

we want to help people who are less fortunate. Strangers come to London—from the provinces—from America—steeped in London's romance which they have got from books. But the reality is a terrible anticlimax. They need to be helped if they are to recapture the other Londons which are still there layer on layer, the Londons of Chaucer and the Elizabethans, and Milton and Dr. Johnson and Charles Lamb and Dickens . . . And Oxford . . . and Edinburgh . . . and Bath . . . and the English country. We want to get past the garages and petrol pumps and county council cottages to the ancient rustic England which can never die."

"I see. Glamour off the peg. You will charge a price for it, of course?"

She looked at me gravely and reprovably, and her lids opened to reveal agate eyes.

"We shall charge a price," she said. "But money-making will not be our first object."

I had offended her by my coarse phrase, and I got no more confidences that evening. It was plain that Reggie was being equipped with several kinds of harness; his day was mapped out, he was in-spanned in a family team, and now his vagrant fancies were to be regimented. I thought a good deal about him on my holiday, while I explored the spring flowers of the Jura. One of my reflections, I remember, was that Moe's moment of prevision had failed badly so far as he was concerned. Reggie was not likely to undertake any foreign adventure, having anchored himself by so many chains to English soil.

6

Some time in May I began to have my doubts about the success of the partnership.

May is the pleasantest of months for a London dweller. Wafts of spring are blown in from its green cincture, the parks are at their gayest, there is freshness in the air, and the colours, the delicate half-shades of the most beautiful city on earth, take on a new purity. Along with late October, May had always been Reggie's favourite season. First there would be the early canter in the Park. Then a leisurely breakfast, the newspaper, and his first pipe, with the morning sun making delectable patterns on the bookshelves. He would write a few letters and walk eastward, dwelling lovingly on the sights and the sounds—the flower-girls, the shoppers, the bustle of the main streets, the sudden peace of the little squares with their white stucco and green turf and purple lilacs and pink hawthorns. Luncheon at one of his clubs would follow, or perhaps an agreeable meal at a friend's house. In the afternoon he had many little tasks—visits to the Museum, the sales or the picture galleries, researches in bookshops, excursions into queer corners of the city. He liked to have tea at home, and would spend the hours before dinner over books, for he was a discriminating but voracious reader. Then would come dinner; with a group of young men at a club or restaurant; or at some ceremonial feast, where he enjoyed the experience of meeting new people and making friendly explorations; or best of all at home, where he read till bedtime.

He had his exercise, too. He played a little polo at Roehampton and a good deal of tennis. He was an ardent fisherman, and usually spent the week-ends on a Berkshire trout stream, where he had a rod. He would have a delightful Friday evening looking out tackle, and would be off at cockcrow on Saturday in his little car, returning late on the Sunday night with a sunburnt face and an added zest for life. . . . I always felt that, for an idle man, Reggie made a very successful business of his days, and sometimes I found it in my heart to envy him.

But now all this had changed. I had a feverish time myself that May with the General Election, which did not, of course, concern Reggie. When I got back to town and the turmoil was over, I ran across him one afternoon in the Strand, and observed a change in him. His usual wholesome complexion had gone; he looked tired and white and harassed—notably harassed. But he appeared to be in good spirits. “Busy!” he cried. “I should think I was. I never get a moment to myself. I haven’t had a rod in my hand this year—haven’t been out of London except on duty. You see, we’re at the most critical stage—laying down our lines—got to get them right, for everything depends on them. Oh yes, thanks. We’re doing famously for beginners. If only the American slump would mend. . . .”

I enquired about Miss Cortal, as I was bound to do. No engagement had been announced, but such a relationship could only end in marriage. People had long ago made that assumption.

“Oh, Verona’s very well. A bit overworked

like me." There was an odd look in his eyes, and something new in his voice—not the frank admiration and friendliness of the pre-Easter period—something which was almost embarrassment. I set it down to the shyness of a man in first love.

I asked him to dine, but he couldn't—was full up for weeks ahead. He consulted a little book, and announced his engagements. They all seemed to be with members of the Cortal family. Luncheon was the same. On my only free days he was booked to Shenstone, the maiden aunt, and cousins from Norfolk who had taken a house in town. He left me with the same hustled, preoccupied face. . . . Next day I saw him on the Embankment walking home with the Cortal brothers. They were smiling and talking, but somehow he had the air of a man taking exercise between two genial warders.

I spoke to my cynical nephew about it. "The Shinies!" Charles exclaimed. "Not the Sheenies—there's nothing Jewish about Cortal Frères. When will the world realise that we produce in England something much tougher than any Hebrew? We call them the Shinies, because of their high varnish. . . . Old Reggie is corralled all right, shoes off, feet fired and the paddock gates bolted! . . . Will he marry the girl? I should jolly well think so. He's probably up to his ears in love with her, but even if he loathed her name he would have to go through with it. . . . And he'll espouse a dashed lot more than the buxom Miss Verona—all her uncles and her nephews and her cousins and her aunts for ever and ever. They say that when a man marries a Jewess he finds himself half-smothered under a great feather bed of steamy

consanguinity. Well, it will be the same with the Cortals, only the clan will be less sticky. Reggie will never again call his soul his own. I'm not sure that he'll want to, but anyhow he won't. They'll never let him alone. He used to be rather a solitary bird, but now he'll have his fill of relations, all as active as fleas. What does the Bible say? 'He shall receive an hundredfold houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers—with persecutions. . . .' With persecutions, mark you. Reggie is for it all right."

As it happened I was so busy with arrears of cases that my life was cloistered during the last week of May and the first of June, and I thought no more of Reggie's fortunes. But on the 7th day of June I had a letter from him, enclosing the proof of a kind of prospectus and asking me what I thought of it.

I thought many things about it. It was a statement of the aims of the "Interpreter's House," which was to be circulated to a carefully selected list in England and America. In every sentence it bore the mark of Verona's fine Roman hand. No man could have written it. There was an indecency about its candour and its flat-footed clarity from which the most pachydermatous male would have recoiled.

In its way it was horribly well done. It was a kind of Stores List of the varieties of English charm and the easiest way to get hold of them. Merlin's Isle of Gramarye had at last got its auctioneer's catalogue. Not that it was written in the style of an estate-agent. It was uncommonly

well written, full of good phrases and apposite quotations, and it carried a fine bookish flavour. But ye gods! it was terrible. Relentlessly it set down in black and white all the delicate, half-formed sentiments we cherish in our innermost hearts and dare not talk about. It was so cursedly explicit that it brushed the bloom off whatever it touched. A June twilight became the glare of an arc lamp, the greenery of April the arsenical green of a chemist's shop. Evasive dreams were transformed into mercantile dogmas. It was a kind of simony, a trafficking in sacred things. The magic of England was "rationalised" with a vengeance. . . . There could be no doubt about its effectiveness. I could see the shoddy culture of two continents seizing upon it joyously as a final statement of the "English proposition." It was a magnificent commercial prospectus for the "Interpreter's House." But I wondered how Reggie felt about it—Reggie who had always had a maidenly shyness about his inner world.

It seemed to me that the time had come for a heart-to-heart talk with him. I resolved to be very careful, for I was dealing with perilous stuff. If he was in love with Verona I dared not speak my mind, and even if there was no love, there were deep obligations of gratitude.

He dined with me at the House on the evening of June 8th, and afterwards we talked in a corner of the terrace. His looks made me uneasy, for he seemed both listless and restless. He kept looking nervously about him, as if at any moment something hostile might attack him. He had the air of a smallish rabbit caught in a largish trap.

But it was a stoical rabbit, for to me he made no complaint. In a leaden voice he announced that he was the most fortunate of men. His business was flourishing, and in the autumn it was proposed to form a company. . . . At last he had found a vocation in life. Yet there was as much conviction in his voice as in the babbling of a sleep-walker.

I asked him baldly when he was going to be married. In even tones he replied that nothing had as yet been settled. But the form of his answer implied that something would soon be settled. I forbore to enquire farther, for his gaze was fixed glassily on the tower of Lambeth Palace.

Then of his own accord he asked me what I had thought of the prospectus. I hastily resolved that no good could come of candour. Reggie had made his bed and meant to lie on it, and it was not for me to put in extra thorns.

"Very well done," I said; "what the Germans call *appetitlich*. It should give you an excellent send-off."

"You didn't think it vulgar?"

"Not a bit," I lied. "Half-tones and broken lights won't do in business. You must be emphatic."

He nodded. "I agree with you. She wrote it, you know. Michael revised it, but in substance it was her work."

I said something silly about having detected the finer female touch. Then he rose to go—he had an appointment with an American at the Savoy. It had been the most hopeless evening, for I had never come near him. He seemed to be separated from me by a vast thicket, and I felt that if I laid an axe

to the bushes they would scream like mandrakes.

When we said good-bye, I felt a sudden wave of liking and pity. I patted him on the shoulder. "I hope you're going to be very happy, old man," I said, but he made no answer.

As I went back to my rooms I suddenly thought with grim amusement of what had happened at Flambard a year before. That story, so far as Reggie was concerned, was over. Youth's infinite choice of roads had given place to a rigid groove, presided over by a relentless marmoreal blonde.

7

But I was wrong. It may have been merely the sight of me as part of his old life, or it may have been my last words, but something that night brought Reggie to breaking-point. When he got home he rang up Tallis at Libanus, found that he was in London, ran him to ground at the Travelers', and arranged to meet him the following morning. I do not know why he turned to Tallis, except that it was at his house that he had first met Verona, and that he seemed to stand for him on the dividing-line between a world which he had loved and a world which he had come to hate and fear.

Tallis told me this part of the story. They lunched together, and talked afterwards beside the fireplace in the hall. He had not seen Reggie for nearly six months, and was shocked at the change in him. As he expressed it, Reggie's coat was all sulky and his body like a cab horse.

According to Tallis, Reggie plunged at once into his tale, telling it with a kind of angry vehemence,

rather dim about details, but desperately clear on the main points. He had lost everything he cared for in life, he said ; he was involved in a juggernaut of a business, ground under a juggernaut of a family, and about to be tied up for life to a juggernaut of a girl. This last he only implied, for he spoke no disrespectful word of Verona.

" You haven't proposed to her ? " Tallis asked.

Reggie said he hadn't, but that everybody expected him to, including, he feared, the lady herself. There was to be a Cortal family dinner the following night, and it had been gently but firmly hinted to him that that would be a fitting moment to announce the engagement.

" I gather that you're not in love with her ? " said Tallis.

Reggie looked wooden. He was trying to live up to his code. " I admire her immensely," he stammered. " And I'm grateful to her—far more grateful than I can ever express. I owe her a tremendous lot. . . . She has worked like a slave for me—given up most of her time—oh, she's a marvel ! Unselfish, too. . . . Nobody has ever taken such an interest in me. . . . "

" I know, I know. But do you love her ? "

Then, just as an ice jam cracks on a river, Reggie's decorum went with a rush.

" No, by God," he cried wildly. " I don't love her ! And she doesn't love me. She has taken me up, and she'll stick to me till I'm in my grave, but she doesn't love me. She couldn't love anybody—not made that way. I'm only her business partner, the thing she needed to round off her life. . . . Love her ! O Lord, I'm nearer hating her. I'm

in terror of her. She mesmerises me, like a stoat with a rabbit. She has twenty times my brains, and I've simply got to do as I'm told. . . . And then there's her awful family. I'm lapped in them, suffocated by them. I loathe her infernal apes of brothers—they're so cursed gentleman-like and efficient and patronising. Dash it all man, there are times when I can scarcely keep from hitting their blinking faces."

He dragged a paper from his pocket, and flung it at Tallis.

"There's worse still. Look at that. Read it carefully and smack your lips over its succulent beastliness. That's the Cortal idea of what I'm going to give my life to. That's the prospectus of my business. The 'Interpreter's House,' by God! It has interpreted them to me all right. Do you grasp the perfect hell of it? I'm to spend my days with the things I thought I cared about, but the gloss is rubbed off every one of them. I'm to be a sort of Cook's guide to culture on a sound commercial basis. Damn it, I'd rather clean out drains in Chicago, for then I should know that there was a jolly world to which I might some day return. But it's just that jolly world that's been blasted for me."

He dropped his head on his hands and groaned.

"There's no way out except to cut my throat, and that wouldn't be playing the game. I suppose I must go through with it. I mustn't behave like a cad. . . . Besides, I daren't. I simply haven't the nerve."

Tallis was smiling cryptically.

"Funny you should tell me this. For the same thing happened to me about a quarter of a century ago."

Reggie looked up quickly. "Gospel truth?" he asked.

"Gospel truth. She was an American—from Philadelphia—very pretty, and sweet, and sticky as barley sugar. She had a family, too, just like the Cortals, and she had a business mind. She took me up, and meant to run me, and at first I was fascinated. Then I saw that it would mean Gehenna—Gehenna for both of us."

"What did you do?" The question came like a pistol crack.

"I did the only thing. Ran away and hid myself. Very far away—to western Tibet. I thought at the time that I was behaving like a cad, but now I know that it would have been far more caddish to have gone on. Marriage by capture doesn't suit people like you and me."

Reggie stared.

"I am not going to Tibet," he said. He had forgotten all about Moe and Flambar, but something remained by way of an inhibition against the Orient.

"No need to. The world is wide. There's plenty of other places."

Tallis rose and rang a bell.

"I'm an abstemious man," he said; "but I always drink brandy in moments of crisis. This is a crisis for you, my lad, and I'm going to take charge of it. You must run away and hide, like a little boy. It's the only thing to do, and it's also the wisest and the most courageous thing. Cut

the painter, burn the ship, hew down the bridge behind you."

There was light in Reggie's dull eyes.

"Where shall I run to?" he asked, and his voice had lost its flatness.

"Come with me," said Tallis. "I'm off to-morrow morning, and shall be away for the better part of a year. I have a bit of work to do before I can finish my book. I have shut up Libanus and sent my valuables to the bank. We go up to Liverpool to-night, so you will just have time to make your arrangements."

"I'm not going east," said Reggie, as the vague recollection rose again in him.

"No more am I. I am going west."

Tallis fetched a sheet of club notepaper on which he wrote with a fat gold pencil.

"We must proceed according to Cocker," he said. "No secret shuffling out of the country. This is an announcement of my departure which will appear in the Press to-morrow, and I have added your name. It is your Declaration of Independence to all whom it may concern. Also you are going straight from here to see Verona and tell her. That will correspond to the tea chests in Boston Harbour. The train for Liverpool leaves at ten minutes past seven. We can dine on it."

"What shall I say to her?" Reggie faltered, but not as one without hope.

"That's your concern. You will find words if you really mean business. You are improving on my conduct, for I never made my adieux to the lady, but then Verona has done a good deal for you, and she is old Jim Jack's niece. After all, it's

a kindness to her, for a girl with her brains can do better for herself than a chap like you. When you get home, you'll find that she has espoused some appalling magnate."

Reggie was on his feet, his lassitude gone, his shoulders squared. He spruced himself up with the help of an adjacent mirror, and his movements were brisk.

"Right," he said. "The seven-ten at Euston. I needn't take much luggage, for I can buy what I want in . . ." He stopped short. "New York is no good. I can't hide myself there. The Cortals know half the place, and those blighted brothers are always hopping over."

Tallis was paying for the brandy.

"You needn't worry about that," he said. "New York is only our jumping-off point. We are bound for farther south . . . Central America . . . a place called Yucatan."

XLIX: SIR ROBERT GOODEVE

"A covert place
Where you might think to find a din
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
Wandering, and many a shape whose name
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,
And your own footsteps meeting you,
And all things going as they came."

D. G. ROSSETTI, *The Portrait*.

I

FOR five months after that Whitsuntide at Flambard I saw and heard nothing of Goodeve. But I could not get him out of my mind, for of all the party he had struck me as the one to whom the experience meant the most, the one who had been

the most tense and expectant. Whatever he had seen on the phantasmal *Times* page of a year ahead he would take with the utmost seriousness. I liked him so much that I was a little anxious about him. He was finer clay than the others.

My own attitude towards Moe's experiment varied during these months. Sometimes I was inclined to consider the whole thing the vagary of a genius gone mad. But there were moments when I remembered his brooding pits of eyes and the strange compulsion of his talk, and came again under his spell. I made an opportunity to see Landor—the man I had telephoned to from Flambard before my first conversation with Moe—and tried to discover what substance a trained scientist might find in Moe's general theory. But Landor was not very helpful. The usual reaction had begun, and I gathered that at the moment the dead man had more critics than followers. Landor declared that he did not profess to understand him, but that the common view was that the speculations of his last years had been a sad declension from his earlier achievements in physics and mathematics. "It is the old story," he said. "Age means a breaking down of partition walls, and the imagination muddies the reason. Moe should have ended as a poet or a preacher. He had got a little beyond science." I tried to put limply Moe's theory of Time, and Landor wrinkled his brows. "I know that there are people working on that line," he said, "but I don't think they have made much of it. It's rather outside my beat. More psychology than physics."

This conversation did little to reassure me. So

far as Goodeve was concerned, it was not the actual validity of Moe's doctrine that mattered, but his own reactions to the experience. And an incident in the last week of October rather shook the scepticism which I had been trying to cultivate. For I opened the newspaper one morning to learn that young Molsom had been appointed a Lord of Appeal straight from the Bar, a most unexpected choice. Yet I had expected it, for in my efforts to throw my mind a year forward under Moe's direction I had had a vision of the future House of Lords tribunal. The figure on the Woolsack had been blurred, but Molsom had been perfectly clear, with his big nose and his habit of folded arms.

In the beginning of November Sir Thomas Twiston died, and Goodeve, the prospective candidate, had to face a by-election. The Marton division of Dorset was reckoned one of the safest Tory seats in the land, but this contest had not the dullness of the usual political certainty. Goodeve was opposed, and though the opposition was futile, the election gave an opportunity for some interesting propaganda. It fell just after Geraldine had concluded his tour in the North, where he had made a feature of unemployment and his new emigration policy—a policy which, as I have already mentioned, was strongly disliked by many of his own party. Goodeve, who had always been an eager Imperialist, saw his chance. He expounded his leader's views with equal eloquence and far greater knowledge. The Press reported him at length, for his speeches were excellent copy; he dealt wittily and faithfully with both Waldemar and the Liberals and the "big business" group in his own

party. Before the contest was over he had become a considerable personality in politics.

In fulfilment of an old promise I went down to speak for him on the eve of the poll. We had three joint meetings, and I was much impressed by his performance. Here was a new voice and a new mind, a man who could make platitudes seem novelties, and convince his hearers that the most startling novelties were platitudes. He looked vigorous and fit, and his gusto seemed to dispose of my former anxieties.

But at the hotel on the evening of the election day I realised that he had been trying himself high. His fine, dark face was too sharp for health, and his wholesome colour had gone. He was so tired that he could scarcely eat a mouthful of supper, but when I wanted him to go to bed he declared that it was no good, since he could not sleep. He kept me up till the small hours, but he did not talk much—not a word about the election and its chances. Next day he looked better, but I was glad when the declaration of the poll was over. He was in by an immense majority, nearly fourteen thousand, and there was the usual row in the streets and a tour of committee rooms. I had meant to get back to town for luncheon, but something in his face made me change my plans. "Won't you spare me one night?" he begged. "Come back with me to Goodeve. I implore you, Leithen. You do me more good than anybody else on earth, and I need you to help me to recover my balance." I could not resist the appeal in his eyes, so I sent off a few telegrams, and in the late afternoon escaped with him from Marton.

It was a drive of about forty miles through a misty November twilight. He scarcely uttered a word, and I respected his mood and also kept silence. The man was clearly dog-tired. His house received us with blazing fires and the mellow shadows of the loveliest hall in England. He went straight upstairs, announcing that he would have a bath and lie down till dinner.

At dinner his manner was brisker. He seemed to feel the comfort of release from the sickening grind of an election, and I realised that the thing had been for him a heavy piece of collar work. Goodeve was not the man to enjoy the debauch of half-truths inevitable in platform speeches. I expected him to talk about politics, which at the time were in a considerable mess. I told him that he was entering Parliament at a dramatic moment with a reputation already made, and said the sort of encouraging things which the ordinary new member would have welcomed. But he did not seem much interested in the gossip which I retailed. When I speculated on Geraldine's next move he yawned.

He was far more inclined to talk about his house. I had never stayed at Goodeve before, and had fallen at once under the spell of its cloudy magnificence. I think I used that very phrase, for such was my main impression. It had an air of spaciousness far greater than its actual dimensions warranted, for all its perspectives seemed to end in shadows, to fade away into a world where our measurements no longer held. . . . When I had first talked with him at Flambard he had been in revolt against the dominance of the old house

which was always trying to drag him back into the past, and had spoken of resisting the pull of his ancestors. Now he seemed to welcome it. He had been making researches in its history, and was full of curious knowledge about his forbears. After dinner he had the long gallery on the first floor lit up, and we made a tour of inspection of the family portraits.

I was struck, I remember, by the enduring physical characteristics of his race. Most of his ancestors were dark men with long faces, and that odd delicacy about mouth and chin which one sees in the busts of Julius Cæsar. Not a strong stock, perhaps, but a fine one. Goodeve himself, with his straight brows, had a more masterful air than the pictures, but when I looked at him again I thought I saw the same slight over-refinement, something too mobile in the lips, too anxious in the eyes. "Tremulous, impressional," Emerson says that the hero must be, and these were the qualities of the old Goodeves which leaped at once from their portraits. Many had been heroes—notably the Sir Robert who fell at Naseby and the Sir Geoffrey who died with Moore at Corunna—but it was a heroism for death rather than for life. I wondered how the race had managed to survive so long.

Oddly enough it was their deaths that seemed chiefly to interest Goodeve. He had all the details of them—this one had died in his bed at sixty-three, that in the hunting-field at forty, another in a drinking bout in the early twenties. They appeared for the most part to have been a short-lived race and tragically fated. . . .

By and by this mortuary tale began to irritate

me. I preferred to think of the cuirassed, periwigged or cravated gentlemen, the hooped and flounced ladies, as in the vigour of life in which the artist had drawn them. And then I saw that in Goodeve's face which set me wondering. On his own account he was trying to puzzle out some urgent thing—urgent for himself. He was digging into his family history and interrogating the painted faces on his walls to find an answer to some vital problem of his own.

What it might be I could not guess, but it disquieted me, and I lent an inattentive ear to his catalogue. And then I suddenly got enlightenment.

We had left the gallery and were making our way to the library through a chain of little drawing-rooms. All had been lit up, and all were full of pictures, mostly Italian, collected by various Goodeves during the Grand Tour. They were cheerful rooms, papered not panelled, with a pleasant Victorian complacency about them. But in the last the walls were dark oak, and above the fireplace was a picture which arrested me. Good-eve seemed to wish to hurry me on, but when he saw my interest he too halted.

It was a Spanish piece, painted I should think by someone who had come under El Greco's influence, and had also studied the Dutch school. I am no authority on art, but if it be its purpose to make an instant and profound impression on a beholder, then this was a masterpiece. It represented a hall in some great house, paved with black and white marble. There was a big fire burning in an antique fireplace, and the walls blazed with

candles. But the hangings were a curious dusky crimson, so that in spite of the brilliant lighting the place was sombre, suggesting more a church than a dwelling. The upper walls and the corners were in deep shadow. On the floor some ten couples were dancing, an ordered dance in which there was no gaiety, and the dancers' faces were all set and white. Other people were sitting round the walls, rigidly composed as if they were curbing some strong passion. At the great doors at the far end men at arms stood on guard, so that none should pass. On every face, in every movement was fear—fear, and an awful expectation of something which was outside in the night. You felt that at any moment the composure might crack, that the faces would become contorted with terror and the air filled with shrieks.

The picture was lettered "La Peste," but I did not need the words to tell me the subject. It was a house in a city where the plague was raging. These people were trying to forget the horror. They had secluded themselves in a palace, set guards at the door, and tried to shut out the world. But they had failed, for the spectre rubbed shoulders with each. They might already have the poison in their blood, and in an hour be blue and swollen. One heard the rumble of the dead cart on the outer cobbles making a dreadful bass to the fiddles.

I have never received a stronger impression from any picture. I think I must have cried out, for Goodeve came close to me.

"My God, what a thing!" I said. "The man who painted that was a devil!"

"He understood the meaning of fear," was the answer.

"Not honest human fear," I said. "That is the panic of hell."

Goodeve shook his head.

"Only fear. Everybody there has still a hope that they may escape. They are still only fearful and anxious. Panic will come when the first yellow pustules show on the skin. For panic you must have a certainty."

Something in his tone made me turn my eyes from the picture to his face. He had become like all his ancestors; the firm modern moulding had slackened into something puzzled and uncertain, as of a man groping in a dim world. And in his eyes and around his lips was the grey shadow of a creeping dread.

My mind flew back to Flambard. I knew now that on that June morning Goodeve had received some fateful message. I thought I could guess what the message had been.

2

We drifted to the library, and dropped into chairs on each side of the hearth. It was a chilly night, so the fire had been kept high, and the room was so arranged that the light was concentrated around where we sat, and the rest left in shadow. So I had a good view of Goodeve's face against a dusky background. He had lit a pipe, and was staring at the logs, his whole body relaxed like a tired man's. But I caught him casting furtive glances in my direction. He wanted to tell me something; perhaps he saw that I had guessed,

and wanted me to ask a question, but I felt oddly embarrassed and waited.

He spoke first.

"Moe is dead," he said simply, and I nodded.

"It is a pity," he went on. "I should have liked another talk with him. Did you understand his theories?"

I shook my head.

"No more did I," he said. "I don't think I ever could. I have been reading Paston and Crevalli and all round the subject, but I can't get the hang of it. My mind hasn't been trained that way."

"Nor mine," I replied. "Nor, as far as I can gather, that of anybody living. Moe seems to have got into a world of his own where no one could keep up with him."

"It is a pity," he said again. "If one could have followed his reasoning and been able to judge for oneself its value, it would have made a difference . . . perhaps."

"I ought to tell you," I said, "that I've been making enquiries, and I find that our best people are not inclined to take Moe as gospel."

"So I gather. But I'm not sure that that helps. Even if his theories were all wrong, the fact would still remain that he could draw back the curtain a little. It may have been an illusion, of course, but we can't tell . . . yet."

He stared into the fire, and then said very gently, "You see—I got a glimpse inside."

"I know," I said.

"Yes," he went on, "and I believe you have guessed what I saw."

I nodded.

"Let me tell you everything. It's a comfort to me to be able to tell you. . . . You're the only man I could ever confide in. . . . You were there yourself and saw enough to take it seriously. . . . I read, for about a quarter of a second, my own obituary. One takes in a good deal in a flash of time if the mind is expectant. It was a paragraph about two inches long far down on the right-hand side of *The Times* page opposite the leaders—the usual summary of what is given at length in the proper obituary pages. It regretted to announce the death of Sir Robert Goodeve, Baronet, of Goodeve, M.P. for the Marton division of Dorset. There was no doubt about the man it meant. . . . Then it said something about a growing political reputation and a maiden speech which would not be soon forgotten. I have the exact words written down."

"Nothing more?"

"No . . . yes. There was another dead man in the paragraph, a Colonel Dugald Chatto, of Glasgow. . . . That was all."

Goodeve knocked out his pipe and got to his feet. He stretched himself, as if his legs had cramped, and I remember thinking how fine a figure of a man he was as he stood tensely in the firelight. He was staring away from me into a dim corner of the room. He seemed to be endeavouring by a bodily effort to shake himself free of a burden.

I tried to help.

"I'm in the confidence of only one of the others," I said. "Reggie Daker. He read the announcement

of his departure for Yucatan on a scientific expedition. Reggie knows nothing about science and hates foreign parts, and he declares that nothing will make him budge from England. He says that forewarned is forearmed, and that he is going to see that *The Times* next June is put in the cart. He has already forgotten all about the thing. . . . There seems to me to be some sense in that point of view. If you know what's coming you can take steps to avoid it. . . . For example, supposing you had given up your parliamentary candidature, you could have made *The Times* wrong on that point, so why shouldn't you be able to make it wrong on others? "

He turned and bent his strong dark brows on me.

"I thought of that. I can't quite explain why, but it seemed to me scarcely to be playing the game. Rather like funking. No. I'm not going to alter my plan of life out of fear. That would be giving in like a coward."

But there was none of the boisterousness of defiance in his voice. He spoke heavily, as if putting into words an inevitable but rather hopeless resolution.

"Look here, Goodeve," I said. "You and I are rational men of the world and we can't allow ourselves to be the sport of whimsies. There are two ways of looking at this Flambard business. It may have been pure illusion caused by the hypnotic powers of a tremendous personality like Moe, with no substance of reality behind it. It may have been only a kind of dream. If you dreamed you were being buried in Westminster Abbey next

week you wouldn't pay the slightest attention."

"That is a possible view," he said. But I could see that it was not the view he took himself. Moe's influence upon him had been so profound, that, though he could not justify his faith on scientific grounds, he was a convinced believer.

I had a sudden idea.

"Listen to me. I can prove that it is illusion. Moe told us that our minds could get a larger field of observation, which would include part of the future. Yes, but the observing thing was still our mind, and that presupposes a living man. Therefore for a man to see the report of his death is a contradiction in terms."

He turned his unquiet eyes on me.

"Curious that you should say that, for I raised the very point with Moe. His answer was that the body of the observer might be dead, but that the mind did not die. . . . I was bound to admit his argument, for, you see, I, too, believe in the immortality of the soul."

There was such complete conviction in his tone that I had to give up my point, though I was not convinced, even on Goodeve's hypothesis.

"Very well. The other view is that, by some unknown legerdemain, you actually saw what will be printed in *The Times* on the next 10th of June. But it may be a hoax or some journalistic blunder. False news of a man's death has often been published. You remember Billy Devereux seven years ago. Reggie Daker isn't going to Yucatan, and there's no more reason why you should be dead."

He smiled, and his voice was a little more cheerful.

"I would point out," he said, "that there is a considerable difference between the cases. Going to Yucatan is a voluntary act which requires the actor's co-operation, while dying is usually an involuntary affair."

"Never mind," I cried. "We are bound to believe in free will up to a point. It's the assumption on which life is conducted. What you must try to do is to banish the whole thing from your mind. Defy that damned oracle. You've begun right by getting into Parliament. Go on and make the best maiden speech of the day. Fate will always yield if you stand up to it."

"Thank you, Leithen," he said. "I think that is sound advice. I'm ashamed to have let you see that the thing worried me. Nobody else in the world has the slightest notion. . . . But you're an understanding fellow. If you're willing, you can be a wonderful stand-by to me, for I'm a lonely bird and apt to brood. . . . I've another comfort, for there's that second man in the same case. I told you that I read the name of Colonel Dugald Chatto. I've made enquiries about him. He's a Glasgow wine merchant, who was a keen Territorial, and commanded a battalion in the War. Man about forty-seven, the hard, spare, scratch-man-at-golf type that never was ill in its life. Health is important, for *The Times* would have said 'killed,' if it had been death by accident. I've noticed that that's its custom."

"There's nothing much wrong with your health," I put in.

"No. I'm pretty fit."

Again he stretched his arms, as if pushing an

incubus away from him. He looked down at me with an embarrassed smile. But the next moment his eyes were abstracted and back in the shadowy corners.

3

Goodeve took his seat in the House, and then for a fortnight sat stolidly on the back Opposition benches. Everybody was curious about him, and our younger people were prepared to take him to their hearts. They elected him straight off a member of a group of Left-wing Tories, who dined together once a week and showed signs of becoming a Fourth Party. But he seemed to be shy of company. He never went near the smoking-room, he never wrote letters in the library, one never saw him gossiping in the lobbies. He was polite and friendly, but as aloof as the planet Mars. There he sat among the shadows of the back benches, listening attentively to the debates, with a queer secret smile on his face. One might have thought that he was contemptuous of it all, but for his interested eyes. He was watching closely how the game was played, but at the same time a big part of his mind was sojourning in another country.

There was general interest in his maiden speech, and it was expected that it would come soon. You see, what was agitating the country at the moment was Geraldine's new crusade, and Goodeve had fought his election on that, and had indeed proved himself as good an exponent of the new Imperialism as his leader. Some of his sentences had already passed into the stock stuff of the Press and

the platform. He got the usual well-meant advice from the old hands. Members who did not know him would take him aside, and advise him to get the atmosphere of the place before he spoke. "It won't do," they told him, "to go off at half-cock. You've come here with a good deal of prestige, and you mustn't throw it away." Others thought that he should begin modestly and not wait for a full-dress occasion with red carpets down. "Slip into the debate quietly some dinner-hour," they counselled, "and try out your voice. The great thing is to get the ice broken. You'll have plenty of chances later for the bigger thing." Goodeve's smiling reticence, you see, made many people think that he would be nervous. I asked him about his plans, and he shook his head. "Haven't got any. I shall take my chance when it comes. I'm in no hurry." And then he added what I did not like. "It's a long time till the 10th of June."

I asked our Whips, and was told that he had never spoken to them about the best moment to lift up his voice. They seemed to find him an enigma. John Fortingall, who ran the dining group I have mentioned, confessed himself puzzled. "I thought we had got an absolute winner," he declared, "but now I'm not so sure. There's no doubt about the brains, and they tell me he can put the stuff across. Everybody who knows him says he's a good fellow too. But all I can say is, he's a darned bad mixer. He looks at you as if you were his oldest friend, and then shoves you gently away as if you were going to pinch his tie-pin. Too frosty a lad for my taste."

Goodeve told nobody about his plans, and he succeeded most successfully in surprising the House. He chose the most critical debate of the early session, which took place less than three weeks after he entered Parliament. It was a resolution of no confidence moved by Geraldine, and was meant to be a demonstration in force against the Government, and also a defiance to the stand-patters on our own side.

There was no hope of success, for Waldemar and the Liberals would vote against it, and we could not count on polling our full strength, but it was believed that it might drive a wedge into Labour and have considerable effect in the country. Goodeve must have had some private arrangement with the Speaker, but he said nothing to his Front Bench. The Leader of the Opposition was as much taken by surprise as anybody.

Geraldine moved the resolution in one of the best speeches I ever heard from him—conciliatory and persuasive, extraordinarily interesting and salted with his engaging humour. He deliberately kept the key low, and attempted none of the flights of eloquence which had marked his campaign in the North. Mayot replied—the Prime Minister was to wind up the debate—and Mayot also was good. His line was the sagacious enthusiast, welcoming Geraldine's ideals, approving his general purpose, but damping down his ardours with wholesome common sense—the kind of speech which never fails of appeal to Englishmen. Then came Waldemar in a different mood. It was a first-class debating performance, and he searched out the joints in Geraldine's harness and probed

them cunningly. He was giving no quarter, and there was vitriol on his sword's point. He concluded with a really fine defence of the traditional high-road of policy, and a warning against showy by-paths, superbly delivered and couched in pure, resounding, eighteenth-century prose. When he sat down there was nearly a minute of that whole-hearted applause which the House gives, irrespective of party, to a fine parliamentary achievement.

Then Goodeve was called, and not, as was expected, the ex-Foreign Secretary. He had a wonderful audience, for the House was packed, and keyed up, too, by Waldemar, but it was the kind of audience which should have made the knees of a novice give under him. There had been three speeches by old parliamentary hands, each excellent of its kind, and any maiden effort must be an anti-climax. But Goodeve seemed to be unconscious of the peril. He was sitting at the corner of the second bench above the gangway, and had been taking notes unconcernedly while the others were speaking. He had a few slips of paper in his hand, and that hand did not shake. He looked around his audience, and his eye was composed. He began to speak, and his voice was full and steady. . . .

The House expects a new member to show a becoming modesty. A little diffidence, an occasional hesitation, are good tactics in a maiden speech, whether or not there be any reason for them. But there was no halting, no deprecatory air with Goodeve, and after the first minute nobody expected it. It would have been absurd, for this was clearly a master, every bit as much a

master of the spoken word as Waldemar or Geraldine. . . . I understood the reason for this composure. Goodeve knew that success was predestined.

He began quietly and a little dully, but the House was held by its interest in his first appearance and by his pleasant voice. First he dealt with Mayot, and his courtesy could not prevent his contempt from peeping out. Mayot and his kind, he said, were mongers of opinion, specialists in airy buildings, but incapable of laying one solid brick on another on solid earth—a view received with enthusiasm by Collinson and some of the Labour Left Wing. Mayot, who was very ingenious at digging out awkward sentences from past Tory speeches, had quoted something from Arthur Balfour. Goodeve retorted with a most apposite quotation from Canning: "It is singular to remark how ready some people are to admire in a great man the exception rather than the rule of his conduct. Such perverse worship is like the idolatry of barbarous nations, who can see the noonday splendour of the sun without emotion, but who, when he is in eclipse, come forward with hymns and cymbals to adore him."

But on the whole he dealt lightly with Mayot; it was when he turned to the more formidable Waldemar that he released his heavy batteries. He tore his speech to pieces with a fierce, but icy, gusto. There was no strained or rhetorical word, no excited gesture, no raising of the even, soothing voice, but every sentence was a lash flicking off its piece of skin. It was less an exposure of a speech than of a habit of mind and a school of thought.

Waldemar, he said, was one of those to whom experience meant nothing, whose souls existed in a state of sacred torpidity prostrated before cold altars and departed gods. His appeal to common sense was only an appeal to the spiritual sluggishness which was England's besetting sin, and which in the present crisis was her deadliest peril. Waldemar's peroration had really moved the House, but Goodeve managed to strip the glamour from it and make it seem tinsel. He repeated some of the best sentences, and the connection in which he quoted them and the delicate irony of his tone made them comic. Members tittered, and the Liberal Front Bench had savage faces. It was one of the cleverest and cruellest feats I have ever seen performed in debate.

Then he turned on the "big business" section of his own party, who were hostile to Geraldine, and had begun to coquet with Waldemar. Here he fairly let himself go. He addressed the Speaker, but every now and then wheeled slowly round and looked the wrathful, high-coloured magnates in the face. The extraordinary thing was that they made no audible protest; the tension of the House was too great for that. In Mayot he had trounced the timid visionary, in Waldemar the arid dogmatist, and in these gentry he dealt with the strong, silent, practical man. He defined him, in Disraeli's words, as "one who practises the blunders of his predecessors." They were always talking about being consistent, about sticking to their principles, about taking a strong line. What were their principles, he asked urbanely? Not those of the Tory Party, which had always looked

squarely at realities, and had never been hide-bound in its methods. Was it not possible that they mistook stupidity for consistency, blind eyes for balanced minds? As for their vaunted strength, it was that of cast-iron and not of steel, and their courage was the timidity of men who lived in terror of being called weak. In the grim world we lived in there was no room for such fifth-form heroics.

All this was polished and deadly satire which delighted everyone but its victims. And then he suddenly changed his mood. After a warm expression of loyalty to Geraldine, he gave his own version of the road to a happier country. It was a dangerous thing for a man who had been making game of Waldemar's eloquence to be eloquent on his own account, but Goodeve attempted it, and he brilliantly succeeded. His voice fell to a quiet reflective note. He seemed to be soliloquising, like a weary man who, having been in the dust of the lists, now soothes himself with his secret dreams. The last part of his speech was almost poetry, and I do not think that in my long parliamentary experience I ever heard anything like it. Certainly nothing that so completely captured its hearers. Very gently he seemed to be opening windows beyond which lay a pleasant landscape.

He spoke for a few minutes under the hour, an extravagant measure for a maiden speech. There was very little applause, for members seemed to be spell-bound. I have never seen the House hushed for so long. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The Prime Minister thought it necessary

to rise at once, but he had a poor audience. The House emptied, as if members felt compelled to go elsewhere to get their bearings again and to talk over this portent.

Goodeve kept his place till Trant finished, and then he followed me out of the House. We went down to the terrace, which was empty, for it was a grey November afternoon with a slight drizzle. After a big oratorical effort, especially a triumphant effort, a man generally relaxes and becomes cheerful and confidential. Not so Goodeve. He scarcely listened to my heartfelt congratulations. I remember how he leaned over the parapet, watching the upstream flow of the leaden tide, and spoke to the water and not to me.

"It is no credit to me," he said. "I was completely confident. . . . You know why. . . . That made me able to put out every ounce I had in me, for I knew it would be all right. If you were in for a race and knew positively that you would win, you would be bound to run better than you ever ran before."

I have a vivid recollection of that moment, for I felt somehow that it was immensely critical. Here was a man who by his first speech had turned politics topsy-turvy. Inside the Palace of Westminster every corridor was humming with his name; in the newspaper offices journalists were writing columns of impressions, and editors preparing leaders on the subject; already London tea-tables would be tooting it, and that night it would be the chief topic at dinner. And here was the man responsible for it all as cold as a tombstone, negligent of the fame he had won, and

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thinking only of its relation to a few lines of type that would not be set up for half a year.

My problem was his psychology, not facts but the way he looked at them, and I gave him what I considered sound advice. I told him that he had done a thing which was new in the history of Parliament. By one speech he had advanced to front-bench status. Party politics were all at sixes and sevens, and he had now the ear of the House as much as Trant and Geraldine. If he cared he could have a chief hand in the making of contemporary history. He *must* care, and for this reason—that it was the best way to falsify the *Times* paragraph. If he went on as he had begun, in six months anything that might happen to him would not get half a dozen lines but a column and half-inch headings. He had it in his own power to make that disquieting glimpse at Flambard an illusion. . . . You see, I was treating the Flambard affair seriously. I had decided that that was the best plan, since it had so eaten into Goodeve's soul.

I remember that he sighed and nodded his head, as if he agreed with me. He refused an invitation to dine, and left without going back to the Chamber. Nor did he return for the division—an excited scene, for Geraldine's motion was only lost by seventeen votes, owing to many Labour members abstaining.

4

Next week old Folliot asked me to luncheon. It was about the time when, under Mayot's influence, he was beginning to sidle back into politics. I had known him so long that I had acquired a

kind of liking for him as a milestone—he made me feel the distance I had travelled, and I often found his tattle restful.

We lunched at his club in St. James's Street. The old fellow had not changed his habits, for he still had his pint of champagne in a silver mug, and his eye was always lifting to note people whose acquaintance he liked to claim. But I found that what he wanted was not to impart the latest gossip but to question me. He was acutely interested in Goodeve, and wished to know everything about him.

"It is the sorrow of my life," he told me, "that I missed his speech. I had a card for the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery, as it happened, and I meant to go there for the opening of the debate. But I had some American friends lunching with me, and we stayed on talking and I gave up the idea. You heard it, of course? Did it sound as well as it read? I confess it seemed to me a most refreshing return to the grand manner. I remember Randolph Churchill . . ." Folliot strayed into reminiscences of past giants, but he always pulled himself up and came back to the point, for he seemed deeply curious about Goodeve. "His assurance now—astonishing in a young man, but I understand that it did not offend the House. . . . Of course the speech must have been carefully prepared, and yet it had real debating qualities. That quip about Waldemar's reference to Mr. G., for example—he could not have anticipated that Waldemar would give him such a chance. . . . With the close, I confess, I was less impressed. Excellent English, but many people can speak

good English. Ah, no doubt! Better to hear than to read. They tell me he has a most seductive voice."

I could tell him little, for I had only known Goodeve for six months, but I expanded in praise of the speech. Folliot cross-examined me closely about his manner. Was there a proper urbanity in his satire? Did he convince the House that he was in earnest? Was there no pedantry?—too many quotations, possibly? The House did not relish the academic. Above all, was there the accent of authority? Could he keep the field together as well as show it sport?

"He may be the man we have all been looking for," he said. "On paper he certainly fills the bill. Young enough, good-looking, well-born, rich, educated, fine War record, considerable business knowledge. He sounds almost too good to be true. My one doubt is whether he will stay the course. You see, I know something about the Goodeves. I knew his uncle, old Sir Adolphus."

I pricked up my ears. Folliot was beginning to interest me.

"A singular family, the Goodeves," he went on. "Always just about to disappear from the earth, and always saved by a miracle. This young man was the son of the parson, Adolphus's brother, who was cut off with a hundred pounds because he took up with the High Church lot, while his father was a crazy Evangelical. Adolphus avenged him, for he wasn't any sort of Christian at all. I remember the old man well. He was a militant Agnostic, a worshipper at the Huxley and Tyndall shrines—dear me, how all that has gone out to-day! He

used to come to town to address meetings in the Essex Hall, to which he invited a selection of the London clergy. They never went, but some of us young men used to go, and we were always rewarded. The old fellow had quite a Disraeli touch in vituperation. He was a shocking scarecrow to look at, though he had a fine high-nosed face. Not always washed and shaven, I fear. His clothes were a disgrace—his trousers were half-way up his legs, and his hat and coat were green with age. He never spent a penny he could avoid, always travelled third class and kept on only one club, because it did not charge for bread and cheese and beer, and so he could lunch free. He had a dread that he might die in beggary—scattered his money in youth, and then got scared and relapsed into a miser. He died worth a quarter of a million, but all the cash they found in the house was ninepence. Hence the comfortable fortune of your young friend. That was so like the Goodeves—they were always having notions—panics, you might call them—which perverted their lives.”

Folliot had more to say about Sir Adolphus. He had been a distinguished marine biologist in his youth, and had made an expedition to the Great Barrier Reef and written a notable book about it. Then he had suddenly cut adrift from the whole business. Something gave him a distaste for it—the handling of an octopus, Folliot suggested, or too close an acquaintance with a man-eating shark. “Terribly high-strung people,” said Folliot. “They didn’t acquire dislikes, so much as horrors. People used to say that Adolphus’s aversion to Christianity was due to his having been once

engaged to Priscilla Aberley. She was very devout in those days, and was by way of saving his soul, so, when she jilted him for Aberley, Adolphus had no more use for souls in the parson's sense."

"He died only a year or two ago," I put in. "Did you see anything of him in his last days?"

Folliot smiled. "Not I. Nobody did, except his doctor. I understand that he wouldn't have this young man near the place. He shut himself up, and nursed his health as he nursed his money. He must have launched out at last, for he had a scientific valet to see that his rooms were kept at an even temperature, and he had a big consultant down from London if he had as much as a cold in his head. . . . A little mad, perhaps. It looked as if he were in terror of death. Odd in a man who did not believe in any kind of after-life. I fancy that was one of the family traits."

"I can't agree," I said. "They were a most gallant race. I've poked a little way into the family history, and there was hardly a British war in which a Goodeve did not distinguish himself and get knocked on the head. Unlucky, if you like, but not a trace of the white feather."

Then Folliot said a thing which gave me some respect for his intelligence. "No doubt that is true. They could face death comfortably if it came to them in hot blood. But they could not wait for it with equanimity. They had spirit, if you like, but not fortitude."

I was so struck by this remark that I missed what Folliot said next. Apparently he was talking about a Goodeve woman, a great-aunt of my friend. She had been some sort of peeress, but I did not

catch the title, and her Christian name had been Portia.

“Old Lady Manorwater knew her well, and used to speak much of her. She had been a raging beauty in her youth, and no better than she should be, people said. Lawrence painted her as Circe—they have the picture at Wirlesdon in the green drawing-room—you must remember it. When she married she ranged herself and gave no further occasion for scandal, but she was still the despair of other wives, for their husbands hung round her like flies round honey. The Duke of Wellington was said to write to her every day, and his brougham stopped at her door twice a week. Melbourne dangled about her skirts, and the young Disraeli wrote her infamous poetry. . . . And then something snapped. She began to get crises of religious terror, and would have parsons to pray with her half the night. Gay as a bird in between, you understand, but when the cloud descended she was virtually a mad-woman. It heightened her beauty and made it more spiritual, for there was a haunted, other-world look in her face. There’s a passage about her in one of Carlyle’s letters. He met her somewhere, and wrote that he could not get her out of his head, for she had eyes like a stricken deer’s. ‘God pity the man or woman’—I think these are his words—‘on whom the fear of Jehovah has fallen. They must break the world, or be themselves broken.’ ”

Folliot saw my interest and was flattered, for he omitted to fuss about the club port.

“Well, she broke,” he continued. “She died . . . quite young. They called it a decline, but old

Lady Manorwater said it was fear—naked fear. There was nothing the matter with her body. . . . Yes, there were children. Rupert Trensham is her grandson, but the Trensham stock is prosaic enough to steady the Goodeve blood.”

I had to hurry back to chambers, and left Folliot ordering a liqueur.

“A queer race,” were his parting words. “That is why I wonder if this young man will last the course. They have spirit without fortitude.”

My appreciation of that phrase had pleased the old fellow. I knew that for the next fortnight he would be repeating it all over London.

5

During the next three months I had the miserable job of looking on at what was nothing less than a parliamentary tragedy. For I watched Goodeve labouring to follow my advice and dismally failing.

He began with every chance. The impression made by his maiden speech was a living memory; he was usually called by the Speaker when he got up, and the House filled when the word went round that he was on his feet. Geraldine's new policy was still the chief issue, and, after its author, Goodeve was its chief exponent. Moreover, he had established a reputation for wit, and for dealing faithfully with opponents, and the House loves a gladiatorial show.

Having started with fireworks, he attempted in the orthodox way to get a name for solid sense and practical knowledge. His next effort, a week later, was on some supplementary estimates, a rather

long and quite prosaic analysis of a batch of figures. I heard much of it, and was on the whole disappointed. It was all too laboured ; he did not make his points cleanly enough ; indeed, it was just the kind of thing which your city man fires off once every session to a small and inattentive House. It had none of the art of his first speech, and, though he got a good Press, it had no real effect upon the debate.

Then he took to intervening briefly in every kind of discussion. He was always more or less relevant, but what he said was generally platitudinous. On the occasions I heard him I missed any note of distinction. He was the ordinary, fairly intelligent member putting up ordinary, fairly intelligent debating points. Our Whips loved him, for he was always ready to keep a debate going when called upon, and I think members approved his modesty in not reserving himself for full-dress occasions. But I could not disguise from myself the fact that his reputation was declining. He, who had got well ahead of other people, had now decorously fallen back into the ranks.

All this time he mixed little with his fellows. He only once attended a dinner of his group, and then scarcely uttered a word. Sally Flambard attempted in vain to get him to her political luncheons. So far as I knew, he never talked politics with anybody. But he rarely missed a division, and would sit solidly to the close of the dreariest debate. He had taken his seat near the end of the third bench below the gangway, so I had no chance of watching his face. But one evening I made an opportunity by going up into

the opposite gallery. He sat very still and composed, I remember, with his eyes narrowed and his head a little bent forward. But the impression I got was of a terrific effort at self-restraint. He was schooling himself to something which he hated and dreaded, bracing himself to an effort on which fateful things depended, and the schooling had brought his nerves to cracking-point.

I did not see him during the Christmas vacation. Then in February came the crisis which I have already recorded, when the nation suddenly woke up to the meaning of the unemployment figures, and Chuff began his extra-mural campaign, and parties split themselves up into Activists and Passivists. You would have said that it was the ideal occasion for Goodeve to take the lead. It was the situation which his maiden speech had forecast, and it was the spirit of that maiden speech which was needed. Waldemar and Mayot were the leading Passivists, and, Heaven knows, they gave openings enough for a critic. Judging by his early form, Goodeve could have turned them inside out and made them the laughing-stock of the country, and he could have made magnificent play with the Prime Minister's shuffling. He could have toned down Collinson's violence, and steadied some of the younger Tories who were beginning to talk wildly. Above all, he could have produced an Activist policy based on common sense, which was the crying need. Geraldine could not do it; he was always the parliamentarian rather than the statesman.

Goodeve tried and most comprehensively failed. He simply could not hold the House—could hold it

far less than Lanyard, who had a voice like a peahen, or John Fortingall, who stuttered and hesitated and rarely got a verb into his sentences. At his first appearance he had shown an amazing gift of catching the atmosphere of the assembly and gripping its attention in a vice. His air had had authority in it, his voice had been compelling, his confidence had impressed without offending. But now . . . great God ! he seemed a different man. I heard him try to tackle Mayot, but Mayot, who had looked nervous when he rose, beamed happily as he continued and laughed aloud when he sat down. There was no grip in him, no word spoken out of strong belief, no blow launched with the weight of the body behind it. He seemed to be repeating—hesitatingly—a lesson which he had imperfectly learned by heart. His personality, once so clean-cut and potent, had dissolved into a vapour.

I missed none of his speeches, and with each my heart grew heavier. For I realised the cause of his fiasco. . . . Goodeve was a haunted man, haunted by a dreadful foreknowledge of fate. In his maiden speech fate had been on his side, since he had a definite assurance that he must succeed. But now he was fighting against fate. The same source, which gave him the certainty of his initial triumph, had denied him the hope of further success. As I had advised, he was striving now to coerce fate, to alter what he believed to be his destiny, to stultify what had been decreed. . . . He could not do it. That very knowledge which had once given him confidence was now keeping it from him. He had no real hope. He was battling against what he believed to be fore-ordained. How could a man

succeed when he understood in his heart that the Eternal Powers had predestined failure?

Yet most gallantly he persevered, for it was a matter of life and death. I alone knew the tragedy of it. To other people he was only a politician who was not living up to his promise, the "Single-speech Hamilton" of our day. But behind the epigrams which did not sting, the appeals which rang feebly, the arguments which lacked bite, the perorations which did not glow, I saw a condemned man struggling desperately for a reprieve.

His last speech was on the Ministry of Labour estimates, when John Fortingall's motion nearly brought the Government down. He rose late in the debate, when the House was packed and the air was electric, since a close division was certain. Waldemar had made one of his sagacious, polysyllabic, old-world orations, and Collinson from the Labour benches had replied with a fiery appeal to the House to give up ancestor-worship and face realities. For one moment I thought that Goodeve was going to come off at last. He began briskly, almost with spirit, and he looked the Treasury bench squarely in the face. His voice, too, had a better ring in it. Clearly he had braced himself for a great effort. . . . Then he got into a mesh of figures, and the attention of members slackened. He managed them badly, losing his way in his notes, and, when one item was questioned, he gave a lame explanation. He never finished that section of his case, for he seemed to feel that he was losing the House, so he hurried on to what he must have prepared most carefully, a final appeal somewhat on the lines of his maiden speech. But ah! the

difference ! To be eloquent and moving one must have either complete self-confidence or complete forgetfulness of self, and Goodeve had neither. He seemed once again to be repeating a lesson badly learned ; his voice broke in a rotund sentence so that it sounded falsetto ; in an appeal which should have rung like a trumpet he forgot his piece, and it ended limply. Never have I listened to anything more painful. Members grew restless and began to talk. Goodeve's voice became shrill, he dropped it to a whisper, and then raised it to an unmeaning shout. . . . He paused—and someone tittered. . . . He sat down.

When Trant rose an hour later to wind up the debate Goodeve hurried from the House. To the best of my belief he never entered it again.

6

Towards the end of March I had to speak in Glasgow, and since my meeting was in the afternoon I travelled up by the night train. I was breakfasting in the hotel, when to my surprise I saw Goodeve at an adjacent table. Somehow Glasgow was not the kind of place where one expected to find him.

He joined me, and I had a good look at him. The man was lamentably thin, but at first sight I thought that he looked well. His dusky complexion was a very fair imitation of sunburn, and that and his lean cheeks suggested a man in hard training. But the next moment I revised my view. He moved listlessly and wearily, and his eyes were sick. It was some fever of spirit, not health, that gave him his robust colouring.

I had to hurry off to do some business, so I suggested that we should lunch together. He agreed, but mentioned that he had invited a man to luncheon—that very Colonel Dugald Chatto whose name he had read in the same obituary paragraph as his own. I said that I should like to meet him, and asked how Goodeve had managed to achieve the acquaintance. Quite simply, he said. He had got a friend to take him to golf at Prestwick, where Colonel Chatto played regularly, had been introduced to him in the club-house, and had on subsequent occasions played several rounds with him. . . . “Not a bad fellow,” he said, and then, when he saw my wondering eyes, he laughed. “I must keep close to him, for, you see, we are more intimately linked than any other two people in the world. We are like the pairs tied up by Carrier in his *noyades* in the Loire—you remember, in the French Revolution. We sink or swim together.”

You could not have found a starker opposite to Goodeve than Chatto if you had ransacked the globe. He was a little stocky man, with a scraggy neck, sandy hair and a high-coloured face, who looked as if he took a good deal of both exercise and whisky. He said he was pleased to meet me, and he thumped Goodeve on the back. He was a cheerful soul.

He ate a hearty luncheon and he was full of chat in the juiciest of accents. He had grievances against the War Office because of their treatment of the Territorial division in which he had served, and he had some scathing things to say about politicians. His sympathies were with the Right

Wing of our party, which Goodeve disliked. "I'm not blaming you, Sir Edward," he told me. "You're a lawyer, and mostly talk sense, if you don't mind my saying so. But Goodeve here used to splash about something awful. I remember reading his speeches, and wishing I could get five minutes with him in a quiet place. I tell you, I've done a good job for the country in keeping him out of Parliament, for he hasn't been near it since him and me foregathered. I'm making quite a decent golfer of him, too. A wee bit weak in his short game still, but that'll improve."

He was a vulgar, jolly little man with nothing in his head, and no conversation except war reminiscences, golf shop, and a fund of rather broad Scots stories. Also he was a bit of an angler, the kind that enters for competitions on Loch Leven. When I listened to him I wondered how the fastidious Goodeve could endure him for half an hour. But Goodeve did more than endure him, for a real friendship seemed to have sprung up between them. There was interest, almost affection, in his eyes. Chatto, no doubt, thought it a tribute to his charms, and, being a simple soul, he returned it. He did not know of the uncanny chain which linked the two incompatibles. I can imagine, if Goodeve had told him, the stalwart incredulity with which he would have received the confession.

The hotel boasted some old brandy which Chatto insisted on our sampling. "Supplied by my own firm, gentlemen, long before I was born." After that he took to calling Goodeve "Bob." "Bob

here is coming with me to Macrihanish, and we're going to make a week of it."

"Don't forget that you're coming to me for the May-fly," Goodeve reminded him.

"Not likely I'll forget. That'll be a new kind of ploy for me. I'm not sure I'll be much good at it, but I'm young enough to learn. . . . Man, I get younger every day. I got a new lease of life out of that bloody war. Talk about shell-shock! I'm the opposite! I'm shell-stimulated, if you see what I mean."

He expanded in recollections, comments, anticipations, variegated by high-flavoured anecdotes. He had become perhaps a little drunk. One could not help liking the fellow, and I began to feel grateful to him, when I saw how Goodeve seemed to absorb confidence from his company. The man was so vital and vigorous that the other drew comfort from the sight of him. Almost all the sickness went out of Goodeve's eyes. His comrade in the *noyades* was not likely to drown, and his buoyancy might sustain them both.

Goodeve saw me off by the night train. I said something complimentary about Chatto.

"There's more in him than you realise at first," he said, "and he's the kindest little chap alive. What does it matter that he doesn't talk our talk? I'm sick of all that old world of mine."

I said something about Chatto's health.

"Pretty nearly perfect. Now and then he does himself a little too well, as at luncheon to-day, but that was the excitement of meeting a swell like you. Usually he is very careful. I've made enquiries among his friends, and have got to know

his doctor. The doctor says he has a constitution of steel and teak."

"And you yourself?" I asked. "You're a little fine-drawn, aren't you?"

For a moment there was alarm in his eyes.

"Not a bit of it. I'm very well. I've been vetted by the same doctor. He gave me the cleanest bill of health, but advised me not to worry. That's why I have cut out Parliament and come up here. Being with Chatto takes me out of myself. He's as good for me as oxygen."

When I asked about his plans he said he had none. He meant to be a good deal in the North, and see as much of Chatto as possible. Chatto was a bachelor with a country-house in Dumbartonshire, and Goodeve was in treaty for a shooting near by. I could see the motive of that: it was vital for him to pretend to himself that the coming 10th of June meant nothing, and to arrange for shooting grouse two months later.

I entered my sleeping-berth fairly well satisfied. It was right that Goodeve should keep in close touch with the man whom destiny had joined to him, and it was the mercy of Providence that this man should be an embodiment of careless, exuberant life.

7

May was of course occupied with the General Election, and for the better part of it I had no time to think of anything beyond the small change of political controversy. I saw that Goodeve was not opposed in the Marton division, and I wondered casually if the florid Chatto had spent

the May-fly season on the limpid and intricate waters which I knew so well. I pigeon-holed a resolution to hunt up Goodeve as soon as I got a moment to turn round.

Oddly enough, the first news I got of him was from Chatto, whom I met at a Scottish junction.

"Ugh, aye!" said that worthy. "I've been sojourning in the stately homes of England. Did you ever see such a place as yon? I hadn't a notion that Bob was such a big man in his own countryside? Ay, I caught some trout, but I worked hard for them. Yon's too expert a job for me, but, by God, Bob's the fine hand at it."

I asked him about Goodeve's health and whereabouts.

"He's in London," was the answer. "I had a line from him yesterday. He was thinking of going on a wee cruise in a week or two. One of those yachting trips that the big steamship companies run—to Norway or some place like that. His health, you say? 'Deed, I don't quite know how to answer that. He wants toning up, I think. Him and me had a week at Macrihanish and, instead of coming on, his game went back every day. There were times when he seemed to have no pith in him. Down at Goodeve he was much the same. There's not much exertion in dry-fly fishing, but every now and then he would lie on his back and appear as tired as if he had been wrestling with a sixteen-foot salmon rod on the Awe. And yet he looks as healthy as a deep-sea sailor. As I say, he wants toning up, and maybe the sea-air is the thing for him."

The consequence of this talk was that I wired to Goodeve, and found that he was still in London on some matter of business. Next day—I think it was May 31st—we dined together at his club. This time I was genuinely scared by his looks, for in the past five or six weeks he had gone rapidly downhill. His colour was still high, but now it was definitely unwholesome, and his thinness had become emaciation. His clothes hung on him loosely, and there were ugly hollows at his temples. Also—and this was what alarmed me—his eyes had the gaunt, hungry, foreboding look that I remembered in Moe's.

Of course I said nothing about his health, but his first enquiry was about Chatto's, when he heard that I had seen him. I told him that I had never seen such an example of bodily well-being, and he murmured something which sounded like "Thank God!"

It was no good beating about the bush, for the time for any pretence between us had long passed.

"In another fortnight," I said, "you will be rid of this nightmare. Now, what is the best way of putting in the time? I'm thinking of your comfort, for, as you know, I don't believe there is the slightest substance in all that nonsense. But it is real to you, and we must make our book for that."

"I agree," he said. "I thought of going for a cruise in the North Sea. The boat's called the *Runeberg*, I think—a Norwegian steamer chartered by a British firm. I fancy it's the kind of thing for me, for these cruises are always crowded—a sort of floating Blackpool. There's certain to be

nobody I know on board, and the discomfort of a rucky company will keep me from brooding. If we get bad weather so much the better, for I'm a rotten sailor. I've booked my cabin, and we sail from Leith on the 6th."

I told him that I warmly approved. "That's the common sense of the thing," I said. "You must bluff your confounded premonitions. On June 10th you'll be sitting on deck inside the Skerrygard, forgetting that there's such a thing as a newspaper. What's Chatto doing?"

"Going on as usual. Business four days a week and golf the rest. He has no forebodings to worry him. I get frequent news of his health, you know. I have a friend in a Glasgow lawyer's office, who knows both him and his doctor, and he sends me reports. I wonder what he thinks of it all. A David and Jonathan friendship, I hope; but these Glasgow lawyers never let you see what is inside their mind."

On the whole I was better pleased with the situation. Goodeve was facing it bravely and philosophically, and Chatto was a sheet-anchor. In a fortnight it would be all over, and he could laugh at his tremors. He was due back in town from the cruise on the 20th, and we arranged to dine together. I could see that he was playing up well to his plan, and filling up his time with engagements beyond the 10th.

I asked him what he proposed to do before he sailed. There was a week-end with Chatto, he said, and then he must go back to Goodeve for a day or two on estate business. I had to return to the House for a division, and, being suddenly

struck afresh by Goodeve's air of fragility, I urged him, as we parted, to go straight to bed.

He shook his head. "I'm going for a long walk," he said. "I walk half the night, for I sleep badly. My only chance is to tire out my body."

"You can't stand much more of that," I told him. "What does your doctor say?"

"I don't know. It isn't a case for doctors. I'm fighting, you see, and it's taking a lot out of me. The fight is not with the arm of flesh, but the flesh must pay."

"You're as certain to win as that the sun will rise to-morrow." These were my last words to him, and I put my hand on his shoulder. He started at the touch, but his eyes looked me steadily in the face. God knows what was in them—suffering in the extreme, fear to the uttermost, courage, too, of the starkest. But one thing I realised—they were like Moe's eyes; and I left the club with a pain in my heart.

8

I never saw Goodeve again. But the following are the facts which I learned afterwards.

He went to Prestwick with Chatto and played vile golf. Chatto, who was on the top of his game and in high spirits, lost his temper with his pupil, and then began in his kindly way to fuss about his health. He asked a doctor friend in the clubhouse to have a look at him, but Goodeve refused his attentions, declaring that he was perfectly fit. Then, after arranging to lunch with Chatto in Glasgow on the 6th before sailing from Leith, Goodeve went south.

It was miserable weather in that first week of June, wet and raw, with a searching east wind. Chatto went to Loch Leven to fish, and got soaked to the skin. He came home with a feverish cold which developed into pleurisy, and on the 5th was taken to a nursing-home. Early on the 6th he developed pneumonia, and before noon on that day Goodeve's Glasgow lawyer friend had sent him this news.

Goodeve should have been in Glasgow that morning, since he was to sail in the *Runeberg* in the late afternoon. But he had already cancelled his passage—I think on the 5th. Why he did that I do not know. It could have had nothing to do with Chatto's illness, of which he had not yet heard. He may have felt that a sea-voyage was giving an unnecessary hostage to destiny. Or he may have felt that his own bodily strength was unequal to the effort. Or some overpowering sense of fatality may have come down like a shutter on his mind. I do not know, and I shall never know.

What is clear is that at Goodeve before the 6th his health had gravely worsened. He could not lie in bed, and he refused to have a doctor, so he sat in a dressing-gown in his shadowy library, or pottered weakly about the ground-floor rooms. His old butler grew very anxious, for his meals were left almost untasted. Several times he tried to rally his spirits, and he drank a little champagne, and once he had up a bottle of the famous port. He had a book always with him, the collected works of Sir Thomas Browne, but according to the butler, it was generally lying unread on his knee.

When he got the telegram about Chatto's illness, his valet told me, he read it several times, let it drop on the floor, and sat for a minute or two looking fixedly before him. Then he seemed to make an effort to pull himself together. He ordered fires to be lit in the long gallery upstairs, and said that henceforth that should be his sitting-room.

For three days Goodeve lived in that cloudy chamber under the portraits of his ancestors with their tremulous, anxious eyes. There was a little powdering-closet next door, where he had a bed made up. Fires were kept blazing night and day on all the four hearths, for he seemed to feel the cold. I believe that he had made up his mind that Chatto must die, and that he must follow. He had several bulletins daily from Glasgow, and, said his valet, seemed scarcely to glance at them. But on the 9th he asked eagerly for telegrams, as if he expected one of moment. He was noticeably frailer, the servants told me, and he seemed sunk in a deep lethargy, and sat very still with his eyes on the fire. Several times he walked the length of the gallery, gazing at the portraits.

About six o'clock on the evening of the 9th the telegram came announcing Chatto's death. Goodeve behaved as if he had expected it, and there came a flicker of life into his face. He sent for champagne and drank a little, lifting up his glass as if he were giving a toast. He told his valet that he would not require him again, but would put himself to bed. The last the man saw of him he was smiling, and his lips were moving. . . .

In the morning he was found dead in his chair.

The autopsy that followed resulted in a verdict of death from heart failure. I alone knew that the failure had come about by the slow relentless sapping of fear.

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There was wild weather in the North Sea on the 8th, and in the darkness before dawn on the 9th the *Runeberg* was driven on to a reef and sank with all on board. As it chanced, Goodeve's name was still on its list of passengers, and it was because of the news of the shipwreck that *The Times* published his obituary on the 10th. Next day it issued the necessary correction, and an extended obituary which recorded that his death had really taken place at his country house.

L : CAPTAIN CHARLES OTTERY

"And because time in it selfe . . . can receive no alteration, the hallowing must consist in the shape or countenance which we put upon the affaires that are incident in these dayes."—RICHARD HOOKER, *Ecclesiastical Polity*.

I

THE announcement on the first page of *The Times*, which Charles Ottery read at Flam-bard, and every letter of which was printed on his mind, ran thus :

"OTTERY.—Suddenly in London on the 9th inst., Captain Charles Ottery, late Scots Fusiliers, of Marlcote, Glos., at the age of 36."

It fitted his case precisely. The regiment was right (the dropping of the "Royal" before its title was a familiar journalistic omission), Marlcote was his family place, and in June of the following

year he would have just passed his thirty-sixth birthday.

I had known Charles since he was a schoolboy, for he was my nephew's friend, and many a half-sovereign I had tipped him in those days. He was the only child of a fine old Crimean veteran, and had gone straight from school into the family regiment, for a succession of Otterys had served in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, though they had not a drop of Scots blood. They came originally, I believe, from Devonshire, but had been settled for a couple of centuries in the Severn valley. Charles was a delightful boy, with old-fashioned manners, for he had been strictly brought up. He always called his father "sir," I remember, and rose when he entered the room. He had a rather sullen, freckled face, tawny hair which curled crisply, and pale-blue eyes which could kindle into a dancing madness, or freeze into a curious mature solemnity. What impressed one about him as a boy was the feeling he gave of latent power. He never seemed to put all of himself into anything—there was an impression always of heavy reserves waiting to be called up. He was the average successful school-boy, not specially brilliant at anything except at real tennis, but generally liked and greatly respected. No one ever took liberties with Master Charles, for the sheath of pleasant manners was felt to cover a particularly stiff bone.

The War broke out when he had been a soldier for six months, and Charles went to France in September 1914. As his friends expected, he made an admirable regimental officer—one of the plain fighting men who were never sick or sorry

during four gruelling years. Being a regular, he had no sensational advancement; he got his company during the Somme, and later had one or two staff jobs, from which he always managed to wangle a speedy return to his battalion. He was happy, because he was young and healthy and competent, and loved his men. After the Armistice he had the better part of a year in Ireland, a miserable time which tried him far more sorely in mind and body than his four years in France. Then his father died, and as soon as the Scots Fusiliers had finished their Irish tour Charles left the service.

He inherited a large and unlucrative landed estate; he was devoted to Marlcote, and he had to find some means of earning money if he wanted to retain it. Through the influence of an uncle he was taken into a London firm of merchant-bankers, and in his quiet resolute way set himself to learn his job. He proved to have a genuine talent for business. His mind was not quick but it was powerful, and he used to burrow his way like a mole to the bottom of a question. Also there was something about his stability and force of character which made men instinctively trust him, and he earned that reputation for judgment the price of which is above rubies. No one called him clever, but everyone believed him to be wise. In three years he was a junior partner in his firm, and after that his advance was rapid. He became a director of the Bank of England, the youngest man, I believe, except Goschen, who ever entered the Bank Parlour; he sat on more than one Government commission, and he was believed to be often

consulted by the Treasury. He figured also in the public eye as an athlete, for he played his favourite real tennis regularly, and had been twice runner-up for the amateur championship.

Then into his orderly life, like a warm spring wind upon a snowfield, came Pamela Brune. Pamela was my goddaughter, and I had watched with amazement her pass from a plain, solemn child to a leggy girl and then to the prettiest *débutante* of her year. Almost in a moment, it seemed to me, the lines of her body changed from angularity to grace, the contours of her small face were moulded into exquisiteness, and her thin little neck became a fit setting for her lovely head. She was tall for a woman, nearly as tall as Charles, but so perfectly proportioned that her height did not take the eye; exquisiteness was the dominant impression, and a kind of swift airy vigour. In her colouring she had taken after her father, and I can best describe it as a delicate ivory lit up, as it were, from within, and nobly framed by her dusky hair. Her eyes were grey, with blue lights in them. Beyond doubt a beauty, and of a rare type. The transformation in her manner was not less striking. She had been a shy child, rather silent and reflective, a good companion on a long walk, when she would expound to me her highly original fancies, but apt at most times to escape notice. Now she was so brilliant to look at that such escape was not for her, and she had developed a manner which was at once defiant and defensive. Young men were a little afraid of her, her eyes were so compelling, taking in much and revealing little, and her deep voice had a disquieting candour.

Charles fell headlong in love, and I could see from the start that the affair would not go smoothly. To begin with, she was very young—scarcely nineteen—and was like a bird preening her wings for flight, whereas Charles was thirty-five and fixed solidly on his perch. He was a little set in his ways and cocksure in his opinions, while she had the sceptical and critical innocence of youth. They became friends at once, but their friendship seemed slow to ripen into anything deeper. Pamela had nothing of the flirt in her, and though young men swarmed round her, there was no other suitor to give Charles heart-disease. The trouble was that he got no farther forward. One reason, perhaps, was that he was far too eligible. The girl had a notion that everyone desired the match, and that her parents counted on it, so naturally she revolted. Another thing—she was quicker-witted than Charles, and had a dozen interests to his one, so that his circumscription was apt to show up poorly in contrast. This was bad for him, for it cast him into a kind of irritable despair, and bad for Pamela, since it made her more critical. When he was schoolmasterish, the pupil put him to shame; when his mood was humble, hers was arrogant.

So during the month before the Flambard party the course of true love did not run smooth. The effect of a grand passion on Charles's tough solidity was what might have been looked for. His nature was not elastic, and instead of expanding under heat was in danger of warping. He was so desperately in love that all his foundations were upset. He could not fit his passion into his scheme of life,

so his scheme of life went by the board. He was miserably conscious of being in a world which he did not understand, of dealing with imponderable things over which he had no mastery. A hasty word, a cold glance from Pamela, would thrust this man, who had always prided himself upon his balance, into a fever of indecision. . . .

And just before Whitsuntide they had had something like a quarrel. He had been magisterial and she had been pert—no, “pert” is not the word—rather disdainful in a silken way, airily detached and infinitely distant. She had not sulked—that would have been far easier for Charles: she had simply set him back firmly among the ranks of her acquaintances. So he had gone to Flambard in a wretched state of mind, and her treatment of him there had been like an acid to his wounds. He found himself in a condition which he had never dreamed of—cut off from the common-sense world which he understood, and condemned to flounder among emotions and problems as evasive as dreams and yet with a terrible potency of torture. Moe was right: Charles Ottery was profoundly unhappy.

2

He had entered upon the experiment at Flambard with a vague hope that he might learn something about the future which would ease his mind. What he did learn was that in a year's time he would be dead.

His first reaction was anger. For four years he had faced the daily possibility, even the likelihood, of death. Now, if during those years anyone had

prophesied his certain death at a certain time, he would have assaulted the prophet. That kind of thing was a breach of the unwritten rules of the game: one had to pretend to oneself and to the world that one would continue to live: it was the assumption which alone made war endurable. Therefore Charles Ottery's first feeling was wrathful and contemptuous. The Professor was dead; otherwise he would have had something to say to him.

This mood lasted perhaps two days—no longer. Gradually it dawned on his mind that this was a revelation altogether outside the control of the human will. He had believed completely in Moe, and he had seen *The Times* announcement with a blinding clarity which precluded the idea of a mistake. Pamela had shaken him out of his old world, and now he had fallen into a far stranger one, altogether beyond the kindly uses of humanity. He tried to be sceptical, but he had never had much gift for scepticism. Critical in any serious sense he could not be, for he had not the apparatus for criticism. Anger was succeeded by a fear which was almost panic. Charles was a notably brave man, and his courage had been well disciplined and tested. He had always been perfectly willing to run risks, and, if need be, to face death with his eyes open. But this was different—this undefined but certain fate towards which he must walk for the next twelve months. He discovered that he passionately wanted to live. Pamela had dropped out of his thoughts, for she was now utterly beyond him—a doomed man could not be a lover—but his passion for her had enriched and deepened the

world for him and therefore increased his love of life.

The first panic passed, and Charles forced himself into a kind of stoicism. Not scepticism, for he could not disbelieve, but a resolution to face up to whatever was in store. He felt hideously lonely, for not only was he too proud to confide in anyone, but he could think of no mortal man who had ever been in a like predicament. If he could have discovered a parallel case, past or present, he would have been comforted. So since there was no one to whom he could unburden his soul, he started to keep a diary. . . . I was not at this time in his confidence, but I have had the use of that diary in telling this story. In it he put down notes of his daily doings and of his state of mind, together with any thoughts that seemed to him cheering or otherwise. It is a scrappy and often confused record, but very illuminating, for he was honest with himself.

His first duty was to show a stout face to the world, and therefore he must try to forget *The Times* paragraph in violent preoccupations. He could not face the society of his fellows, so he went little into the City, but he strove to crowd his life with intense activities. He practised his tennis for several hours each day, played a good deal of golf, and took to keeping a six-tonner on Southampton Water and making week-end expeditions along the coast. From the diary it appeared that this last pursuit was the best aid to forgetfulness, so long as the weather was bad. In a difficult wind he had to concentrate all his faculties on managing the boat, but when there was no such need, he found the deck of his little yacht too conducive to painful meditation.

Presently he realised that these anodynes were no manner of good. Each spell of freedom from thought was succeeded by a longer spell of intense brooding. He had found no philosophy to comfort him, and no super-induced oblivion lasted long. So he decided that he must seek a different kind of life. He had an idea that if he went into the wilds he might draw courage from the primeval Nature which was all uncertainties and hazards. So in August he set off for Newfoundland alone, to hunt the migratory caribou.

Purposely he gave himself a rough trip. He went up-country to the Terra Nova district, and then with two guides penetrated far into the marshes and barrens of the interior. He limited his equipment to the bare necessities, and courted every kind of fatigue. He must have taken a good many risks in his river journey, for I heard from a man who followed his tracks for the brief second season in October that his guides had sworn never again to accompany such a madman. You see, he knew for certain that nothing could kill him for many months. The diary, written up at night in his chilly camps, told the story fully. He got with ease the number of stags permitted by his licence—all of them good beasts—for, since he did not care a straw whether he killed or not, he found that he could not miss. But the interesting things were his thoughts, as they came to him while watching in the dusk by a half-frozen pond, or lying awake in his sleeping-bag looking at the cold stars.

He had begun to reflect on the implications of death, a subject to which he had never given much heed before. His religion was of the ordinary

public-school brand, the fundamentals of Christianity accepted without much comprehension. There was an after-world, of course, about which a man did not greatly trouble himself: the important thing, the purpose of religion, was to have a decent code of conduct in the present one. But now the latter did not mean much to him, since his present life would soon be over. . . . There were pages of the diary filled with odd amateurish speculations about God and Eternity, and once or twice there was even a kind of prayer. But somewhere in the barrens Charles seems to have decided that he had better let metaphysics alone. What concerned him was how to pass the next eight months without disgracing his manhood. He noted cases of people he had known who, when their death sentence was pronounced by their doctor, had lived out the remainder of their days with a stiff lip, even with cheerfulness.

The conclusion of this part of the diary, written before he sailed for home, seems to have been that all was lost but honour. He was like a man on a sinking ship, and owed it to himself to go down with fortitude. There were no entries during the voyage from St. John's, so the presumption is that this resolve gave him a certain peace.

That peace did not survive his return to England. He went back to the City, where he was badly needed, for the bottom was falling out of business. But he seemed unable to concentrate on his work. The sight of his familiar surroundings, his desk, his clerks, the business talks which assumed the continuity of life, the necessity of making plans which would not mature before the following June,

put him into a fever of disquiet. I think that he had perhaps overtired himself in Newfoundland, and was physically rather unstrung ; anyhow, on the plea of health, he again began to absent himself from his work. He felt that he must discover an anodyne to thought, or go mad.

The anodyne he tried was the worst conceivable. Charles had never led the life of pleasure, and had no relish for it ; so now, when he attempted it, it was like brandy to a teetotaller. He belonged to Dillon's, and took to frequenting that club, and playing cards for high stakes. Now, it is a dangerous thing to gamble if you have the mania for it in your blood, but it is more dangerous if your object is to blanket your mind. He won a good deal of money and lost a good deal, and he played with a cold intensity which rather scared his partners. . . . Also he, who had always been abstemious, took to doing himself too well. I met him one night in St. James's Street, and got the impression that the sober Charles was rather drunk. . . . Then there was hunting. He had not had time for years to do much of that, but now he kept horses at Birkham, and went out twice a week. He behaved as he had behaved in the Terra Nova rapids, and took wild risks because he believed that nothing could harm him. For a couple of months he rode so hard that he made himself a nuisance in the field. . . . Then his confidence suddenly deserted him. It occurred to him that any day he might have a smash, and linger bed-ridden till the following June. So he got rid of his hunters and fled from Birkham.

The result of all this was that before Christmas

he had begun to get for himself a doubtful name. At first no one believed that this decorous young man could run amok, but nobody's repute is iron-clad, and presently too many people were ready to surmise the worst. City men reported that he rarely showed up at his office, and was useless when he did. Hunting men had tales to tell of strange manners in the field and an insane foolhardiness. My nephew, who was one of his oldest friends, and belonged to Dillon's, would say nothing at first when I asked him about the stories, but in the end he admitted reluctantly that they were true. "Charles has got mixed up with a poor lot," he said. "Drunken swine like L——, and half-witted boys like little E—— and fine old-fashioned crooks like B——. He hardly recognises me when we meet in the club, for he knows I don't like his bunch. In the evening he's apt to be tight after ten o'clock.

"God knows what's done it!" said my nephew dismally. "Looks as if he weren't able to take his corn. Too big a success too soon, you know. Well, he won't be a success long. . . . I put it down to a virtuous youth. If you don't blow off steam under twenty-five, you're apt to have a blow up later and scald yourself. . . . No, I don't think it is unrequited affection. I've heard that yarn, but I don't believe it. I saw Lady Pam at a dinner last week, and she had a face like a death's head. She's going the pace a bit herself, but she's not enjoying it. Whoever is behaving badly, it ain't her. My notion is that Charles hasn't given the girl a thought for months. Don't ask me for an explanation. Something has snapped in him, the way a racehorse goes suddenly wrong."

I confess that at the time I was more anxious about my goddaughter than about Charles. I knew him fairly well and liked him, but Pamela was very near my heart. I could not blame him, for it was she who had hitherto caused the trouble, but now it was very clear that things were not well with her. . . . She had refused to pay her usual Scots visits, and had gone off with the Junipers to their place on the Riviera. The Juniper girl had only been an acquaintance, but she suddenly blossomed into a bosom friend. Now, the Junipers were not too well regarded by old-fashioned people. Tom and Mollie Nantley hated the business, but they had always made it a rule never to interfere with their daughters, and certainly up to now Pamela had deserved their confidence. It must have been gall and wormwood to them to see the papers full of pictures of the Juniper doings, with Pamela bathing and playing tennis and basking on the sands in the most raffish society. . . . After that she went on a cruise to the Red Sea with some Americans called Baffin. The Nantleys knew very little about the Baffins, so they hoped for the best ; but from what I learned afterwards the company on the yacht was pretty mixed—a journalistic peer, two or three financiers, and a selection of amorous and alcoholic youth.

Pamela returned to England before the end of November. The family always stayed on at Wirlesdon till well into the new year, but she insisted on taking up her quarters in London. She acted in several entertainments got up for charity, and became the darling of the illustrated Press. I saw her once in December, at a dinner given for a ball,

and was glad that Mollie Nantley was not present. The adorable child that I had known had not altogether gone, but it was overlaid with tragic affections. She had ruined her perfect colouring with cosmetics, and her manner had acquired the shrill vulgarity which was then the fashion. She was as charming to me as ever, but in her air there was a curious defiance. Her face had been made up to look pert, but in repose it was tragic. I realised that it was all a desperate bravado to conceal suffering.

3

Lamancha had a Christmas party at his house in Devonshire, and I went there on the 27th. After tea my hostess took me aside.

"We've made an awful *gaffe*," she said. "Charles Ottery is here, and I find to my horror that Pamela Brune is coming to-morrow. I can't very well put her off, but you know that things have not been going well with her and Charles, and their being together may be very painful for both of them."

I asked if Charles knew that Pamela was coming.

"I told him this morning, but he didn't seem interested. I hoped he would discover that he had an engagement elsewhere, but not a bit of it—he only looked blank and turned away. What on earth has happened to him, Ned? He is rather quarrelsome, when he isn't simply deadly dull, and he has such queer moping moods. There is something on his mind, and I don't believe that it's Pamela."

“ Couldn’t you let her know he is here ? ” I asked.

“ I wired to Mollie Nantley, but the only reply I got was about Pamela’s train. She is evidently coming with her eyes open.”

Pamela duly arrived during the following afternoon, when we were out shooting Lamancha’s hedgerow pheasants. I did not see her till dinner, and I had to go off at dawn next morning to London for an unexpected consultation. But that evening I had a very clear and most disquieting impression of her and Charles. Her manner was shrill and rather silly ; she seemed to be acting a part which was utterly unsuited to her kind of beauty and to her character as I had known it. The house-party was not exciting, only pleasant and friendly, and she succeeded in making us all uncomfortable. I did not see her first meeting with Charles, but that evening she never looked at him, nor he at her. He drank rather too much wine at dinner, and afterwards played bezique owlshly in the smoking-room. I had tried to get a word with him, but he shunned me like the plague.

What happened after I left I learned from the diary. Behind the mask he had been deeply miserable, for the sight of the girl had brought back his old happier world. He realised that far down below all his anxieties lay his love for her—that indeed this love was subconsciously the cause of his frantic clutch on life. He had tried stoicism and had failed ; he had tried drugging himself by excitement into forgetfulness and had failed not less dismally. Pamela’s presence seemed to recall

him to his self-respect. He did not notice any change in her—his eyes had been too long looking inward to be very observant: he only knew that the woman who had once lit up his life was now for ever beyond him—worse still, that he had dropped to a level from which he could not look at her without shame. He fell into a mood of bitter abasement, which was far healthier than his previous desperation, for he was thinking now less of the death which was in store for him than of the code of honourable living to which he had been false.

That night he slept scarcely a wink, and next morning he did not show up at breakfast. He told the servant who called him that he was going for a long walk, and slipped out of the house before anybody was down. He felt that he had to be alone to wrestle with his soul.

The diary told something of his misery that day on the high Devon moors. The weather was quiet and tonic with a touch of frost, and he walked blindly over the uplands. Charles was too stiff-backed a fellow to indulge in self-pity, but his type is apt to be a prey to self-contempt. He can have seen nothing of the bright landscape, for he was enveloped in a great darkness—regrets, remorse, a world of wrath with the horror of a deeper shade looming before him. He struggled to regain the captaincy of his soul, but he had no longer the impulse to strive, since he seemed to himself to have already forsworn his standards. There was nothing before him but a dreadful, hopeless passivity, what the Bible calls an "awful looking-for of judgment." The hours of spiritual torment and rapid movement wore down his strength, and

in the afternoon he found that he was very weary. So he walked slowly homeward, having dulled his bodily and mental senses but won no comfort.

In the dusk, at the head of one of the grassy rides in the home woods, as the fates ordained it, he met Pamela. She, unhappy also, had fled from the house for a little air and solitude. Both were so full of their own thoughts that they might have passed without recognition had they not encountered each other at a gate. Charles opened it, and held it wide for the stranger to pass, and it was the speaking of his name that enlightened him as to the personality of the stranger.

"Good evening, Captain Ottery," Pamela said.

He started and stared at her. Something in his appearance held her eyes, for a man does not go through hell without showing it. In those eyes there must have been wonder; there must have been pity too. He saw it, dulled though his senses were, and perhaps he saw also some trace of that suffering which I had noticed in London, for the girl was surprised and had no time to don her mask.

"Pamela!" he cried, and then his strength seemed to go from him, and he leaned heavily on the gate, so that his shoulder touched hers.

She drew back. "You are ill?"

He recovered himself. "No, not ill," he said. He could say no more, for when a man has been wrestling all day with truth he cannot easily lie.

She put a hand on his arm. "But you look so ill and strange."

And then some of the old tenderness must have come into her eyes and voice. "Oh, Charles," she cried, "what has happened to us?"

It was the word "us" that broke him down, for it told him that she too was at odds with life. He had a sudden flash of illumination. He saw that what he had once longed for was true, that her heart was his, and the realisation that not only life but love was lost to him was the last drop in his cup. He stood holding the gate, shaking like a reed, with eyes which, even in the half-light, seemed to be devoured with pain.

"You must have thought me a cad," he stammered. "I love you—I loved you beyond the world, but I dared not come near you. . . . I am a dying man . . . I will soon be dead."

His strength came back to him. He had a purpose now. He had found the only mortal in whom he could confide—must confide.

As they walked down the ride in the winter gloaming, with the happy lights of the house in the valley beneath them, he told her all, and as he spoke it seemed to him that he was cleansing his soul. She made no comment—did not utter a single word.

At the gate of the terrace gardens he stopped. His manner was normal again, and his voice was quiet, almost matter-of-fact.

"Thank you for listening to me, Pamela," he said. "It has been a great comfort to me to tell you this. . . . It is the end for both of us. You see that, don't you? . . . We must never meet again. Good-bye, my dear."

He took her hand, and the touch of it shivered his enforced composure. "I love you . . . I love you," he moaned. . . .

She snatched her hand away.

"This is perfect nonsense," she said. "I won't . . ." and then fled down an alley, as she had once fled from me at Flambard.

Charles had some food in his room, and went to bed, where he slept for the first time for weeks. He had been through the extremes of hell, and nothing worse could await him. The thought gave him a miserable peace. He wrote a line to his hostess, and left for London by the early train.

4

He was sitting next afternoon in his rooms in Mount Street when a lady was announced, and Pamela marched in on the heels of his servant. The room was in dusk, and it was her voice that revealed her to him.

"Turn on the light, Crocker," she said briskly, "and bring tea for two. As quick as possible, please, for I'm famishing."

I can picture her, for I know Pamela's ways, plucking off her hat and tossing it on to a table, shaking up the cushions on the big sofa, and settling herself in a corner of it—Pamela no longer the affected miss of recent months, but the child of April and an April wind, with the freshness of a spring morning about her.

They had tea, for which the anxious Crocker provided muffins, rejoicing to see once again in the flat people feeding like Christians. Pamela chattered happily, chiefly gossip about Wirlesdon, while Charles pulled himself out of his lethargy and strove to rise to her mood. He even went to his bedroom, changed his collar and brushed his hair. When Crocker had cleared away the tea,

she made him light his pipe. "You know you are never really happy with anything else," she said; and he obeyed, not having smoked a pipe since Newfoundland.

"Now," she said at last, when she had poked the fire into a blaze, "I want you to repeat very carefully all that rubbish you told me yesterday."

He obeyed—told the story slowly and dispassionately, without the emotion of the previous day. She listened carefully, and wrote down from his dictation the exact words he had read in *The Times*. She knitted her brows over them. "Pretty accurate, aren't they?" she asked. "Not much chance of mistaken identity."

"None," he said. "There are very few Otterys in the world, and every detail about me is correct."

"And you believe in it?"

"I must."

"I mean to say, you believe that you really saw that thing in *The Times*? You didn't dream it afterwards?"

"I saw it as clearly as I am seeing you."

"I wondered what tricks that old Professor man was up to at Flambard, but I had no notion it was anything as serious as this. What do you suppose the others saw? Uncle Ned is sure to know—I'll ask him."

"He saw nothing himself—he told me so. Lady Flambard fainted, and he was looking after her."

"She saw nothing either, then? I'm sorry, for I can't ask any of the men. I don't know Mr. Tavanger or Mr. Mayot or Sir Robert Goodeve, and Reggie Daker is too much of a donkey to count. It would be too delicate a subject to be

inquisitive about with strangers. . . . You really are convinced that the Professor had got hold of some method of showing you the future? "

"Convinced beyond any possibility of doubt," said Charles dismally.

"Good. That settles one thing. . . . Now for the next point. The fact that you saw that stuff is no reason why it should happen. Supposing you had dreamed it, would you have allowed a dream, however vivid, to wreck your life? "

"But Pamela dear, the case is quite different. Moe showed us what he called 'objective reality.' A dream would have been my own concern, but this came from outside, quite independent of any effort of mine. It was the result of a scientific experiment."

"But the science may have been all cockeyed. Most science is—at any rate, it changes a good deal faster than Paris fashions."

"You wouldn't have said that if you had been under his influence. He didn't want me to die—he didn't make *The Times* paragraph take that form—he only lifted the curtain an inch so that I could see what had actually happened a year ahead. How can I disbelieve what science brought to me out of space, without any preparation or motive? The whole thing was as mathematical and impersonal as an eclipse of the moon in an almanack."

"All right! Let's leave it at that. Assume that *The Times* is going to print the paragraph. The answer is that *The Times* is going to be badly diddled. Somebody will make a bloomer."

Charles shook his head. "I've tried to think

that, but well—you know, that kind of mistake isn't made."

"Oh, isn't it? The papers announced Dollie's engagement to three different men—exact as you please—names and dates complete."

"But why should it make a blunder in this one case out of millions? Isn't it more reasonable to think that there is a moral certainty of its being right?"

Pamela was not succeeding with her arguments. They sounded thin to her own ears, in spite of her solid conviction at the back of them. She sat up, an alert, masterful figure, youth girt for command. She had another appeal than logic.

"Charles," she said solemnly, "this is a horrible business for you, and you've got to pull yourself together. You must defy it. Make up your mind that you're not going to give it another thought. Get back to your work, and resolve that you don't care a lop-eared damn for Moe or science or anything else. Lose your temper with fate and frighten the blasted hussy." Tom Nantley had a turn for robust speech in the hunting-field, and his daughter remembered some of it.

Charles shook his head miserably.

"I've tried," he said, "but I can't. I simply haven't the manhood. . . . I know it's the right way, but my mind is poisoned already. I've got a germ in it that fevers me. . . . Besides, it isn't sense. You can't stop what is to be by saying that it won't be."

"Yes, you can," said the girl firmly. "That's the meaning of Free Will."

Charles dropped his head into his hands. The

sight of Pamela thus restored to him was more than he could bear.

Then she had an inspiration.

“Do you remember the portrait in the dining-room at Wirlesdon of old Sir Somebody-Ap-Something—Mamma’s Welsh ancestor? You know the story about him? He was on the side of Henry Tudor, and raised his men to march to Bosworth. But every witch and warlock in Carmarthen got on to their hindlegs and prophesied—said they saw him in a bloody shroud, and heard banshees wailing for him, and how Merlin had said that when the Ap-Something red and gold crossed Severn to join the Tudor green and white it would be the end of the race—all manner of cheery omens. Everybody in the place believed them, including his lady wife, who wept buckets and clung to his knees. What did the old sportsman do? Told all the warlocks to go to the devil, and marched gaily eastward, leaving his wife sewing his shroud and preparing the family vault.”

“What happened?” Charles had lifted his head.

“Happened? He turned the day at Bosworth, set the Tudor on the throne, got the Garter for his services—you see it in the portrait—and about half South Wales. He and his men came merrily home, and he lived till he was ninety-three. There’s an example for you!”

Pamela warmed to her argument.

“That sort of thing happened all the time in the old days. Whenever anybody had a down on you he got a local soothsayer to prophesy death and disaster in case you might believe it and lose your nerve. And if you had been having a row

with the Church, some priest or bishop had an unpleasant vision about you. What was the result? Timid people took to their beds and died of fright, which was what the soothsayers wanted. Bold men like my ancestor paid not the slightest attention, and nothing happened—except that, when they got a chance, they outed the priest and hanged the soothsayer.”

Charles was listening keenly.

“But the soothsayers were often right,” he objected.

“They were just as often wrong. The point is, that there were men brave enough to defy them—as you are going to do.”

“But the cases aren’t the same,” he protested. “That was ordinary vulgar magic, with a personal grudge behind it. I’m up against the last word in impersonal science.”

“My dear Charles,” she said sweetly, “you’ve let your brains go to seed. I never knew you miss a point before. Magic and astrology and that kind of thing were all the science the Middle Ages had, and they believed in them just as firmly as you believe in Moe. The point is that, in spite of their belief, there were people bold enough to defy it—and to win, as you are going to do. A thousand years hence the world may think Moe and Einstein and all those pundits as babyish as we think the old necromancers. Beliefs change, but courage is always the same. Courage is the line for you, my dear.”

At last she had moved him. There was a light in his eyes as he looked at her, perplexed and broken, but still a light.

"You think . . ." he began, but she broke in. . . .

"I think that you're face to face with a crisis, Charles dear. Fate has played you an ugly trick, but you're man enough to beat it. It's like the thing in the Bible about Jacob wrestling with the angel. You've got to wrestle with it, and if you wrestle hard enough it may bless you."

Her voice had lost its briskness, and had become soft and wooing. She jumped up from the sofa and came round behind his chair, as if she did not want him to see her face.

"I refuse to give another thought to the silly thing," she said. "We are going to behave as if Moe had never been born." Her hand was caressing his hair.

"But *you* are not condemned to death," he said.

"Oh, am I not?" she cried. "It's frightfully important for me. On June 10th of next year I shall be starting on my honeymoon."

That fetched him out of his chair.

He gazed blindly at her as she stood with her cheeks flushed and her eyes a little dim. For a full minute he strove for words and none came.

"Have you nothing to say?" she whispered. "Do you realise, sir, that I am asking you to marry me?"

5

It was now that I entered the story. Mollie Nantley came to town and summoned me to a family conclave. She and Tom were in a mood between delight and anxiety.

"You got my wire?" she asked. "The announcement will be in the papers to-morrow. But they are not to be married till June. Too long to wait—I don't like these long engagements."

"You are pleased?" I asked.

"Tremendously—in a way. But we don't quite know what to think. They never saw each other for six months, and then it all came with a rush. Pam has been rather odd lately, you know, and Tom and I have been very worried. We saw that she was unhappy, and we thought that it might be about Charles. And Charles's behaviour has been something more than odd—so odd that Tom was in two minds about consenting to the engagement. You know how fond we were of him and how we believed in him, but his conduct before Christmas was rather shattering. You are too busy to hear gossip, but I can assure you that Charles has been the most talked-of man in London. Not pleasant gossip either."

"But the explanation seems quite simple," I said. "Two estranged lovers, both proud and both miserable and therefore rather desperate. Chance brings them together, misunderstandings disappear, and true love comes into its own."

Mollie bent her brows.

"It's not as simple as that. If that had been the way of things they ought to be riotously happy. But they're not—not in the least. Pam is as white as a sheet, and looks more like a widow than a bride. She's very sweet and good—very different from before Christmas, when she was horribly tiresome—but you never saw such careworn eyes. She has something heavy on her mind. . . . And

as for Charles! He is very good too and goes steadily to the City again, but he's not my notion of the happy lover. Tom and I are at our wits' end. I do wish you would have a talk with Pamela. She won't tell me anything—I really don't dare to ask—but you and she have always been friends, and if there is any trouble you might help her."

So Pamela came to tea with me, and the first sight of her told me that Mollie was right. In a week or two some alchemy had changed her utterly. Not a trace now of that hard, mirthless glitter which had scared me at the Lamanchas'. Her face was pale, her air quiet and composed, but there was in her eyes what I had seen in Charles Ottery's, an intense, anxious preoccupation.

She told me everything without pressing. She could not tell her parents, she said, for they would not understand, and, if they did, their sympathy would make things worse. But she longed for someone to confide in, and had decided on me.

I saw that it would be foolish to make light of the trouble. Indeed, I had no inclination that way, for I had seen the tortures that Goodeve was undergoing. She told me what she had said to Charles, and the line they were taking. I remember wondering if the man had the grit to go through with it; when I looked at Pamela's clear eyes I had no doubt about the woman.

"He has gone back to his business and has forced himself to slave at it. He is crowding up his days with work. And he is keeping himself in hard training. . . . You see, he has tried the other dopes and found them no good. . . . But he has to fight every step of the road. Oh, Uncle

Ned, I could howl with misery sometimes when I see him all drawn at the lips and hollow about the eyes. He doesn't sleep well, you see. But he is fighting, and not yielding one inch."

And then she quoted to me her saying about Jacob wrestling with the angel. "If we keep on grappling with the brute, it *must* bless us."

"I have to hold his hand all the time," she went on. "That's his hope of salvation. He is feeding on my complete confidence. . . . Oh no, it's not easy, but it's easier than his job. I've to pretend to be perfectly certain that we'll be married next June 10th, and to be always talking about where we shall go for our honeymoon, and where we shall live in town, and how we shall do up Marlcote."

She smiled wanly.

"I chatter about hotels and upholsterers and house-agents when I want to be praying. . . . But I think I understand my part. I have a considerable patch of hell to plough, but it's nothing like as hot as Charles's. . . . No, you can't help, Uncle Ned, dear. We have to go through with this thing ourselves—we two—nobody else. Charles must never know that I have told you, for if he thought that anyone else knew it would add shyness to his trouble. . . . But it's a comfort to me to feel that you know. If anything happens . . . if we fail . . . I want you to realise that we went down fighting."

She kissed me and ran away, and I sat thinking a long time in my chair. She was right: no one could help these two through their purgatory. My heart ached for this child not out of her teens who was trying to lift her lover through the Slough

of Despond by her sheer courage. I do not think that I have ever in my life so deeply admired a fellow-mortal. Pamela was the very genius of fortitude, courage winged and inspired and divinely lit. . . . I told myself that such a spirit could not fail if there was a God in Heaven.

I can only guess at what Charles suffered in the first months of the year. The diary revealed something, but not much, for the entries were scrappy: you see, he was not fighting the battle alone, as he had done in the autumn; he had Pamela for his guide and confessor.

He stuck like a leech to his work, and from all accounts did it well. My nephew said that old Charles had "taken a pull on himself, but had become a cheerless bird." People in the City, when I asked about him, were cordial enough. He had been put on a new economic commission at which he was working hard. One man said that his examination of a high Treasury official was one of the most searching things he had ever heard. Our financial affairs at that time were in a considerable mess, and Charles was bending all his powers to straightening them out.

It was much to have got his brain functioning again. But of course it did not mean the recovery of his old interests. He had only one interest—how to keep his head up till June, and one absorbing desire—to be with Pamela. The girl gave him more than the sustenance of her confidence; there were hours when the love of her so filled his mind that it drove out the gnawing pain, and that meant hours of rest. As sleep restores the body,

so these spells of an almost hapless absence restored his spirit.

But he had patches of utter blackness, as the diary showed. He held himself firm to his resolution by a constant effort of will. He could not despair when Pamela kept her courage. . . . But he would waver at moments, and only recover himself out of shame. There were times, when he bitterly reproached himself. He brought an innocent child into his tortured world and made her share in the tortures. Another life besides his own would be ruined. Out of such fits of self-contempt he had to be dragged painfully by Pamela's affection. She had to convince him anew that she preferred Tophet in his company to Paradise alone.

In March Pamela told me that she had offered to marry him at once, and that he had refused. He was on his probation, he said, and marriage was to be the reward of victory. Also, if he was to be in the grave on June 10th, he did not want Pamela to be a widow. The girl argued, she told me, that immediate marriage would be an extra defiance to Fate, and a proof of their confidence, but Charles was adamant. I dare say he was right; he had to settle such a question with his own soul.

I met him occasionally during those months. Never in ordinary society: by a right instinct Pamela and he decided that they could not go about together and be congratulated—that would make too heavy demands on their powers of camouflage. But I ran across him several times in the street; and I sat next to him at a luncheon given by the Prime Minister to the American Debt

of DEPRESSION. Knowing the story, I looked for changes in him, and I noted several things which were probably hidden from other people. He had begun to speak rather slowly, as if he had difficulty in finding the correct words. He did not look an interlocutor in the face, but fixed his eyes, while he spoke, steadily on the tablecloth. Also, though his pur was healthy, his skin seemed to be drawn firsttight around lips and chin, reminding me of a sorrain Army Commander during the bad time in sc8.

a I asked about Pamela.

1 "Yes, she's in town," he said. "The Nantleys have been up since January. She has caught a beastly cold, and I made her promise to stay indoors in this bitter weather."

Two days later I picked up an evening paper and read a paragraph which sent me post-haste to the telephone. It announced that Lady Pamela Brune was ill with pneumonia, and that anxiety was felt about her condition.

6

The diary told the tale of the next three weeks. Charles had to return to his diary, for he had no other confidant. And a stranger story I have never read.

From the first he was certain that Pamela would die. He was quite clear about this, and he had also become assured of his own end. Their love was to be blotted out by the cold hand of death. For a day or two he was in a stupor of utter hopelessness, waiting on fate like a condemned man who hears the gallows being hammered together and

